



**SHAKIN' STEVENS**  
FROM THE SUNSETS TO  
TOP OF THE POPS



**JOHNNY BURNETTE**  
THE "SPARK PLUG"  
OF ROCKABILLY



**MATT MONRO**  
THE MAN WITH THE  
GOLDEN VOICE

# VINTAGE★ROCK

! ROCK'N'ROLL! THE MUSIC, THE STORIES, THE LIFESTYLE,



**JOE MEEK**

**JOHNNY CASH**

JOHN CARTER CASH  
ON HIS DAD'S  
ORCHESTRAL  
MAKEOVER



**JERRY LEE LEWIS AND  
HIS COMEBACK DECADE**  
"I was ready to get  
back to work!"

## THE GREAT ROCK'N'ROLL REVIVAL

The second coming of Little Richard,  
Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and  
the rest in the 70s

**REVIEWS**

**ELVIS PRESLEY, ARETHA FRANKLIN, ROY ORBISON**  
**WANDA JACKSON, THE SHADOWS & MANY MORE**

DEC 2020/JAN 2021

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VINTAGE  
Issue 48  
ROCK



24

TOM INGRAM  
PRESENTS

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# VINTAGE\*ROCK

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# WELCOME...



Have you ever pondered the way that music fashion seems to revolve around 30-year cycles? The 60s powered the Britpop movement, back-to-basics late-70s bands were back in vogue at the turn of the millennium and all things 80s returned with a vengeance in the 2010s. You can almost set your watch by it...

Last time out in *Vintage Rock*, we looked at how 50s music inspired the neo-rockabilly revival of the 80s,

but in our latest issue we turn our attention to an oft-overlooked chapter in the careers of some of our favourite icons behind the birth of rock'n'roll. The late 60s and 70s were a fertile period for the likes of Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Jerry Lee Lewis, as a new generation of fans discovered their talents. In fact, we hear about that 70s renaissance from The Killer himself as he grants us a rare interview. Music goes through phases of simplicity and indulgence; witness how the beat boom turned into psychedelia and punks put the extravagance of prog to the sword. That said, the visceral excitement of 50s rock'n'roll never truly seems to go out of fashion. It just keeps on regenerating itself time and again, bucking the trend that almost all other genres adhere to.

Elsewhere this issue, I catch up with Johnny Cash's son John Carter Cash to get the inside story on a symphonic project involving The Man In Black and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, plus we take an in-depth look at exciting news of the arrival of a whole raft of unreleased material recorded by Joe Meek. His 'tea chest tapes' are in safe hands – friend of *Vintage Rock*, Alan Wilson, is preparing the haul for release as we speak. The enormity of this task is breathtaking – who knows what secrets will be unlocked in this extraordinary cache from a producer who shaped British music in its infancy.

Enjoy the issue!

Steve

Steve Harnell  
**Editor**

Follow me on Twitter @steve\_harnell







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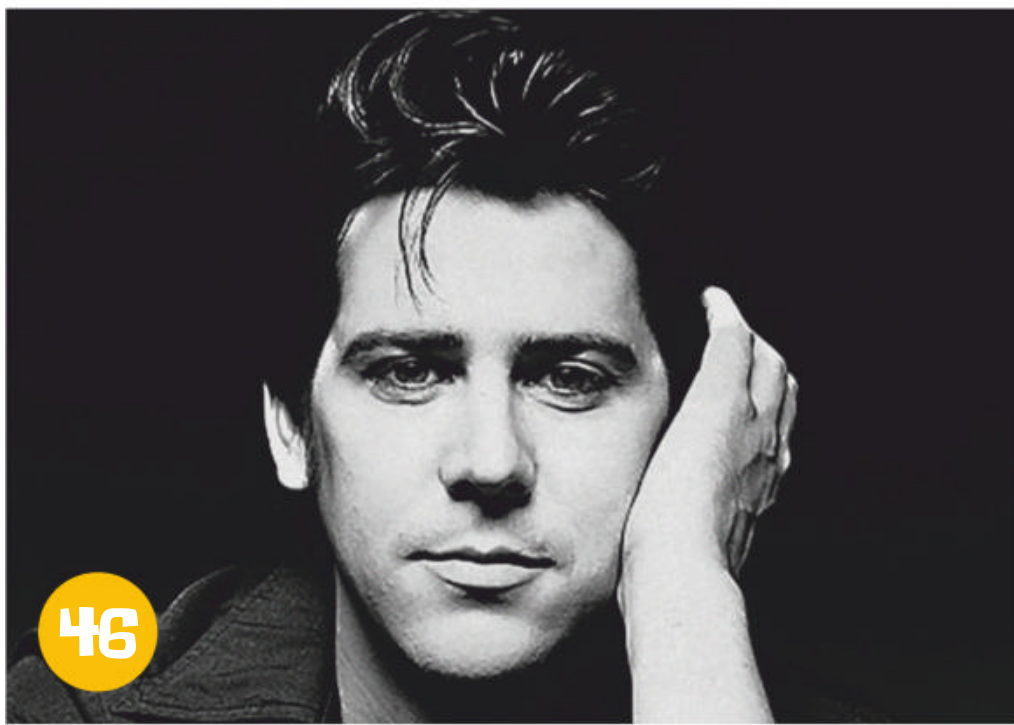
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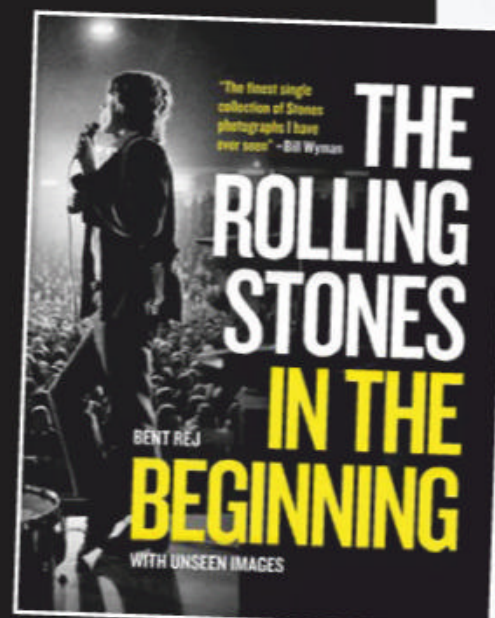
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# ALL *Mama's* CHILDREN

Exclusive candid images of  
the Stones shot by Danish  
photographer Bent Rej





# ***Up close with the Stones***

**Photographer was given 'access all areas' to the band in 1965 and '66**

**A** new expanded edition of a unique collection of photos that takes an intimate look at the early years of The Rolling Stones now includes a number of rare and unseen images.

*The Rolling Stones In The Beginning* features more than 300 shots of the band on stage, on the road and at home – photographer Bent Rej was given unprecedented access to the Stones from the spring of 1965 to the summer of 1966 as they became a worldwide phenomenon. Rej, a young all-rounder photographer for Danish newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*,

who specialised in sport, showbiz and crime subjects before eventually going freelance, soon became friends with the band and briefly joined their inner circle, accompanying them on their first full European tour. Especially revealing are Rej's shots of the Stones relaxing in their respective homes – the photographer formed a particularly close bond with guitarist Brian Jones. Our four photos here are all previously unseen shots.

***The Rolling Stones In The Beginning* by Bent Rej is published by Mitchell Beazley priced £40 and available to buy from [www.octopusbooks.co.uk](http://www.octopusbooks.co.uk)**





## BRIAN 'LICORICE' LOCKING: 1938-2020

BASSIST WHO PLAYED WITH THE SHADOWS, EDDIE COCHRAN AND GENE VINCENT REMEMBERED

Much-loved bassist Brian 'Licorice' Locking has died aged 81. As well as a tenure with Marty Wilde's band The Wildcats and an 18-month stint with The Shadows from 1962-63 – he appeared in the movie *Summer Holiday* with them alongside Cliff Richard – Warwickshire-born Locking also performed with Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, Vince Eager, Joe Brown, Conway Twitty, Brenda Lee and Donovan.

It was *Vintage Rock*'s Eager who gave "Licorice" his nickname; in his earlier years Locking continually played a plastic toy clarinet, often known colloquially as a "a licorice stick". Eager and Locking were members of skiffle group The Vagabonds and, after an appearance at the 2i's coffee bar where they had been offered a residency, Locking joined fellow 2i's musicians Brian Bennett and Tony Sheridan to become Vince Taylor's Playboys who enjoyed chart success with *Brand New Cadillac*. Following his tenure with Marty Wilde's Wildcats, Locking and

Bennett then toured with Tommy Steele during which time Bennett replaced Tony Meehan as the Shadows' drummer to be followed a few weeks later by Locking, who was invited to take over from the band's bassist Jet Harris. Locking played bass and harmonica on many of The Shadows' biggest hits including *Atlantis*, *Dance On* and *Foot Tapper*.

He reprised his role in The Wildcats at Wilde's 50th Anniversary Concert, where he also appeared on stage with all the surviving members of The Shadows.

Brian passed away in October in a North Wales hospice after being diagnosed with cancer. The Shadows' *Apache* was played as the funeral cortege entered the crematorium and a message from Hank Marvin was read out. The service concluded with a recording of Locking playing *Time To Say Goodbye* on harmonica.

● Read Vince Eager's tribute to Brian Locking on pages 92-95



## VEGAS FESTIVAL ORGANISER LAUNCHES RADIO STATION

Viva Las Vegas organiser Tom Ingram is now making waves of a different kind – he's launched an online radio station for rock'n'roll fans. Rockin 247 Radio provides around-the-clock music seven days a week. Ingram explained: "We felt that a rockin' radio station needed something more than what's already out there. The DJs have more say in the running of it and more freedom with their shows. We wanted to cover all of our favourite music: rock'n'roll, rockabilly, R&B, doo wop, hillbilly – original music, current and recent acts. Basically, everything that the worldwide rockin' scene is about."

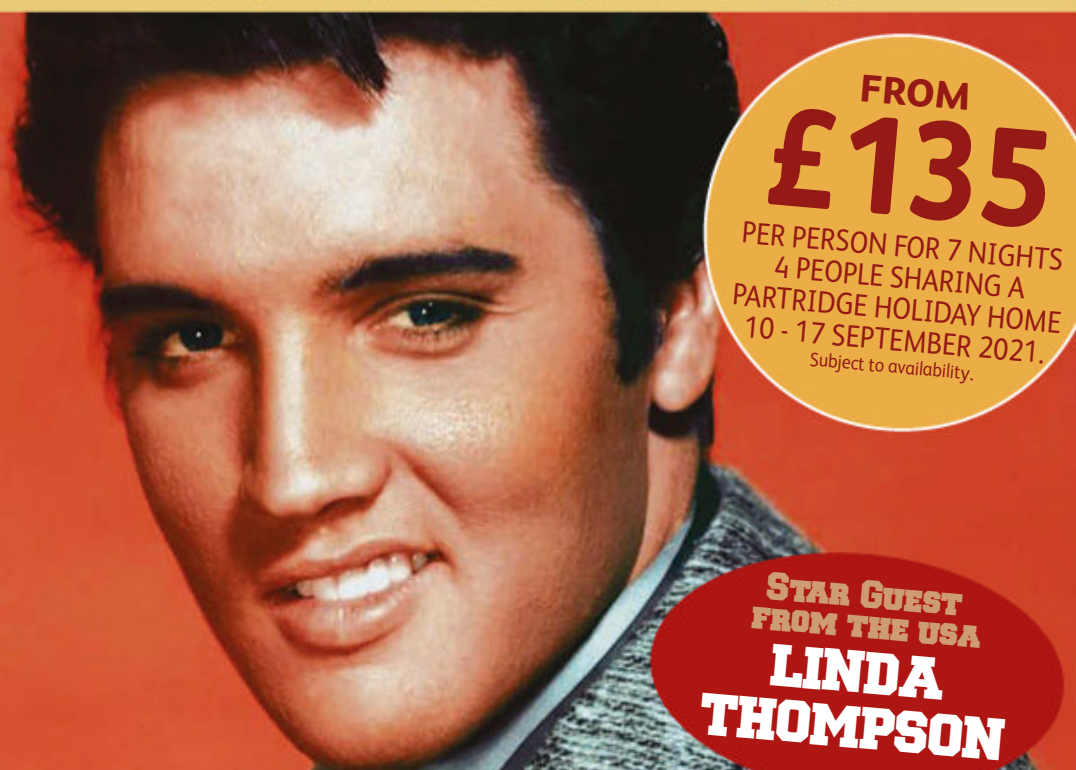
The station's schedule is populated with well-known club and radio DJs, as well as record collectors and musicians from the scene. Rockin 247 Radio can be listened to via your computer, tablet, phone, Alexa and Sonos, or the station's apps for Android and iPhone. Listen and check out the full schedule at [rockin247radio.com](http://rockin247radio.com).



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# John Carter Cash

## Johnny Cash's son talks to Vintage Rock about the iconic singer-songwriter's orchestral makeover at Abbey Road

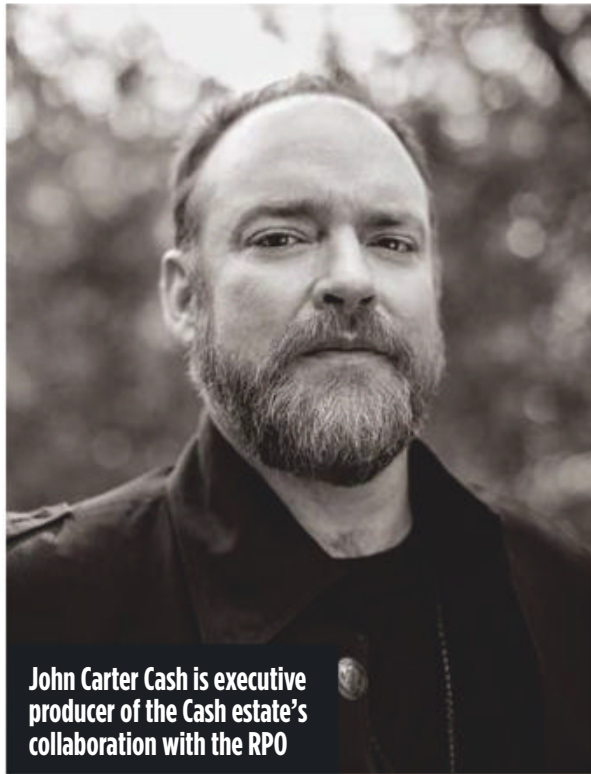
WORDS BY STEVE HARNELL

**T**he Man In Black has joined the hallowed likes of Elvis, Aretha, Roy Orbison and Buddy Holly by being given an orchestral overhaul.

*Johnny Cash And The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra* collects 12 tracks from across the singer-songwriter's career with additional symphonic arrangements recorded at Abbey Road. The new album features classic songs from Cash's career, including *I Walk The Line* and *Ring Of Fire*, alongside lesser-known gems such as *Galway Bay* and *Farther Along*.

*Vintage Rock* caught up with Cash's son John Carter Cash – executive producer on the album – at the Cash Cabin Studio in Tennessee and found him in pragmatic mood about the current pandemic. “The coronavirus is probably the best thing that could have happened to my creativity and energy in terms of making music. I’m also spending a lot of quality time with the family,” he explained. “We live on a big 40-acre farm in Hendersonville, so I’m spending lots of time outdoors and in the studio making music. Maybe we just need to accept this as the ‘new normal’ and move on. That said, I have so many artist friends who are struggling at the moment, because they rely on playing live. That’s how they make their bread and butter.”

Pre-pandemic, the new RPO record, which also features a guest appearance from



John Carter Cash is executive producer of the Cash estate's collaboration with the RPO

**“We didn’t just want to choose the hits, we wanted material that made sense for this specific project”**

Duane Eddy on *Farther Along*, was recorded over four days in London last autumn and found Johnny’s sonorous tones resounding through the corridors in north-west London...

**How did the project with the Royal Philharmonic come about?**

Sony Legacy had previously worked with the RPO on projects with Elvis and Roy Orbison. They approached the John R Cash Trust as to whether we wanted to do this, but I was hesitant at first. I’m always very careful and want to make sure it’s something dad would have endorsed and stood behind. Looking back through his old albums collection, amid all the Buck Owens LPs and whatnot, were three RPO albums from the 60s. I also remember in the 80s, dad took me to a film festival showing the James Bond films and *Goldfinger* was on. He turned to

me and said, “That’s the RPO son,” [on the soundtrack] “that’s the best orchestra in the world”. My dad performed a few times with the Boston Pops Orchestra alongside the great composer John Williams, and on recordings of *The Johnny Cash Show* there was a full symphony orchestra, so hearing my father’s voice with an orchestra is not unprecedented.

**As Johnny’s back catalogue is so extensive, what was the criteria for choosing the material?**

I wanted to go for songs that weren’t overwhelmed by the original production. We didn’t just want to choose the hits, we wanted material that made sense for this specific project. There may be some symphony fans out there who might think this just doesn’t seem right, and perhaps some country music fans that are questioning it. I don’t think many of those people liked his version of Soundgarden’s *Rusty Cage*, for example, though! He stayed true to what he believed in. You can’t please all of the people all of the time. Dad followed his own heart and his own direction. My father crosses so many boundaries, there are heavy metal fans and bluegrass fans who have Johnny Cash records. People say, ‘I don’t like country music, but I like Johnny Cash...’ They claim him as their own on all fronts – musical fronts, personal fronts, political fronts – because he was Everyman’s American. He is of the American soil. This is in the spirit of rebellion and it feels right.

**Was it a thrill to be in Studio 2 at Abbey Road, where The Beatles recorded so much of their work?**

To have the opportunity to work with the album’s producers at Abbey Road really was an honour. The level of their expertise was overwhelming. It sorta shook me in my shoes, I was totally geeked out. It’s a huge complex at Abbey Road, I didn’t realise how big it was. I had a chance to go in the echo chamber where The Beatles did their reverb



Johnny and Bob's version of *Girl From The North Country* finally gets a repair job



The new album is a collection of 12 Cash songs drawn from throughout his career



The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra lending their majesty to the Johnny Cash back catalogue



Carter Cash describes the orchestral arrangements as “awe-inspiring”

work. You look up and down the halls and it's the same tape machines that were there in the 1960s, all the old microphones. You look at the history of the great albums and film music, it was absolutely the right place to do this project – let my father's voice ring through those halls...

**I've always loved the Cash/Dylan duet on *Girl From The North Country* from *Nashville Skyline*. For this latest album, you've even sorted out Dylan's mistake in the third verse...** Why not? [laughs] Dad definitely fixed lots of things later in his career when the technology was available. I think they

would have fixed it back then if they could have, too. Having said that, any editing on this new album was very minimal. We wanted to honour the original.

**How did Duane Eddy become involved in the project?**

He'd worked with my father before. I remember being on tour with Duane in the 90s. He and dad were friends and he'd also collaborated with the RPO in the past. *Farther Along* just makes sense with his



guitar style. He came to the Cash Cabin Studio here to do his parts.

**What does the orchestra bring to these songs?**

It's like a film. This is telling a different depth of an emotional tale, where the background for your painting has completely

different vibrance and colours. It's cinematic in scope, awe-inspiring. ★

***Johnny Cash And The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra* is out now on Sony Legacy. Read our review on page 90.**

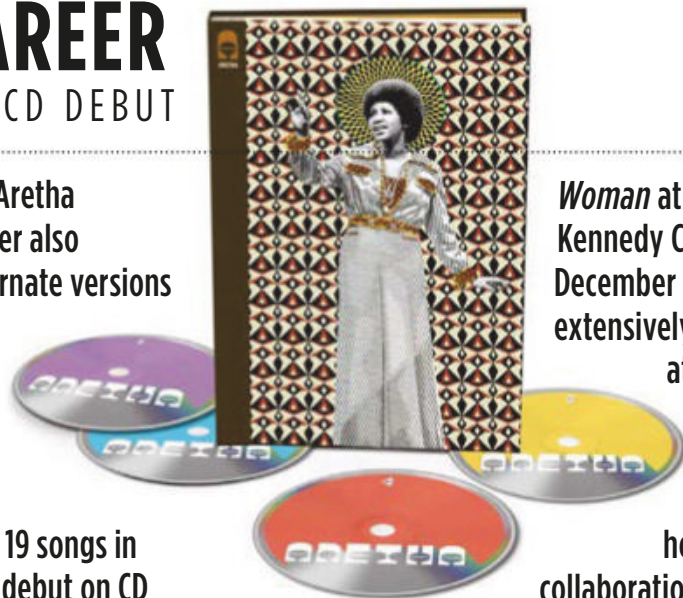


## LAVISH BOXSET CELEBRATES QUEEN OF SOUL'S CAREER

19 SONGS MAKE CD DEBUT

The first boxset to span Aretha Franklin's complete career also features unreleased alternate versions of classic tracks, demos, rarities and special live performances.

The 81-track *Aretha* box covers 60 years of Franklin's life in music – 19 songs in the set are making their debut on CD and in digital form. Arranged mostly in chronological order, the collection begins with Aretha's performances in 1956 at New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit where her father was a pastor and ends with a spine-tingling live treatment of *(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural*



*Woman* at the 38th annual Kennedy Center Honors in December 2015. Delving extensively into her years at Columbia and Atlantic, the boxset also features her early-70s

collaborations with producer Quincy Jones and tenure with

Arista Records between 1980 and 2007.

A cut-down 2LP variant and single-CD version will also be available.

*Aretha* is out now on Rhino. Turn to page 89 to read our review.



Linda Gail Lewis plays *Boogie Woogie Country Girl* at her brother's 85th birthday party

## THE KILLER AND FRIENDS SERVE UP A LIVESTREAM BIRTHDAY BASH

STARS INCLUDING TOM JONES, ELTON JOHN AND RINGO STARR JOIN JERRY LEE AT STAR-STUDED ONLINE PARTY TO CELEBRATE HIS 85TH

Jerry Lee Lewis has celebrated his 85th birthday with a celebrity-packed livestream. Hosted by actor and comedian John Stamos, the show featured tributes from friends including Elton John, Bonnie Raitt, Tom Jones, Joe Walsh, Ringo Starr and former President Bill Clinton, as well as performances by Lee Ann Womack, who

sang The Killer's *Middle Age Crazy* and Lewis' sister Linda Gail, who played *Boogie Woogie Country Girl*. ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons served up his own birthday-themed take on *Great Balls of Fire*. The event raised money for World Vision, a Christian organisation working to help communities lift themselves out of poverty.

## EVENTS

### Rockin' Race Jamboree

4-7 February 2021

**FEATURING** Reverend Horton Heat, Wayne Hancock, Hacienda Brothers, Clint Bradley, The Surfrayettes

#### LOCATION

Torremolinos, Spain

**BOOKING** rockinrace.com



### Why Don't You Just Rock #2

26-27 March 2021

**FEATURING** The Jets, The Rockats, Polecats, The Ricochets, The Quakes, Levi Dexter, Colbert Hamilton & The Nitros

#### LOCATION

Rubery Social Club, Birmingham

**BOOKING** eventbrite.co.uk

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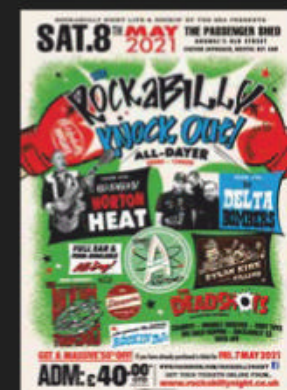
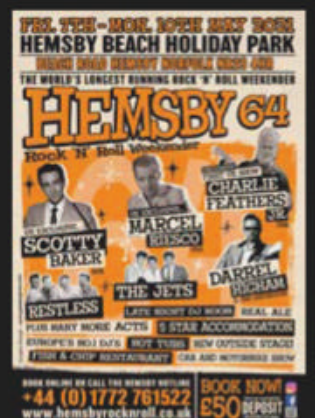
7-10 May 2021

**FEATURING** Scotty Baker, Marcel Riesco, Charlie Feathers Jr, Restless, The Jets, Darrel Higham and the Enforcers

#### LOCATION

Hemsby, Norfolk

**BOOKING** hemsbyrocknroll.co.uk



### The Rockabilly Knock Out!

8 May 2021

#### FEATURING

Reverend Horton Heat, Delta Bombers, Dylan Kirk and the Killers, The Deadshots

#### LOCATION

The Passenger Shed, Bristol

**BOOKING** eventbrite.co.uk

### The Hangar Stomp! Weekender

14-16 May 2021

**FEATURING** Roy Dee and the Spitfires, Miss Mary Ann & The Ragtime Wranglers, The Hayriders, Sonny West, Restless, The Bluecats, Polecats, The Doel Brothers, The Bullets

**LOCATION** Hangar 42, Bruntingthorpe, Leicester

**BOOKING** eventbrite.co.uk





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# PHANTOM ROCKERS

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ON THE  
RADAR

# The Hi-Jivers

**Introducing a band who wear their rockin' blues influences proudly on their sleeves and Big Sandy claims "throb with excitement"**

WORDS BY CRAIG BRACKENRIDGE

**G**uitarist Austin John and vocalist Dawna Zahn moved to Nashville from New York City back in 2014 with only one goal in mind: to form a band inspired by their favourite rhythm & blues and rock'n'roll artists of the 1950s and 60s.

Since then, they've worked hard to establish their brand of raw, rockin' blues in Music City, a place not known for its shortage of bands. Their first full-length album *Something's Gotta Shake*, for Wild Records, showcased their unique sound while laying bare their love of American roots icons such as Big Mama Thornton, Howlin' Wolf and Little Richard. 2020 looked to be a pivotal year for the band until recent global events brought live music

grinding to a halt. However, John is still positive and with their first vinyl output and a new album under construction for a 2021 release, the band's next chapter is about to unfold.

**Was your move to Nashville a real leap of faith as a band?**

Absolutely! Prior to moving to Nashville, Dawna and I both had our own bands in

**"We're constantly inspired and encouraged by the community here in Nashville"**

New York. We knew that finding a new rhythm section in Nashville would be a challenge considering how competitive the music scene is here, but we were excited for a fresh start. We recognised that the move was risky, but had faith in ourselves – we were prepared to work for it. We literally didn't know anyone when we got to town, but by the next Spring we had met Hank Miles and Aaron Mlasko, our founding bass player and drummer, and formed The Hi-Jivers. We're so glad we took the leap. We love this city and truly feel like the rewards have outweighed the risks.

**Nashville must be heaving with bands, did that make it easier or harder for you to get established there?**

It was very intimidating at first. There is so much talent in Nashville, but there aren't many bands playing early rhythm & blues and rock'n'roll, which we think has allowed us to stand out a bit. It's never been easy, but the opportunity to play in this amazing city and all the great musicians we get to call our friends make it worthwhile. We're constantly inspired and encouraged by the community here.

**You managed to fit in a US tour in January, followed by an appearance at the Rockin' Race in Spain soon afterwards, but how badly has the coronavirus affected your plans for further live dates?**

We're so grateful we had the chance to do that tour and perform at the Rockin' Race, because shortly after we realised we would likely be cancelling an entire summer's worth of touring. We had spent countless hours planning and booking three major tours, including our first ever West Coast tour. This was going to be our busiest year yet, it was devastating to have to cancel. Like many other bands, we spent the summer broadcasting livestream shows from home, something that had never even crossed our minds before. It allowed us to continue to





connect with our fans from a distance. The support we've received from them over the past six months has been incredible!

**How important do you feel it is to have a presence on Spotify? Do you feel it has been a useful way to get The Hi-Jivers established?**

This one is tricky. Online streaming is a love/hate relationship for us. While we want our music to be heard by as many people as possible, it's tough to just give away our art. We recognise that streaming is the new normal for younger generations, so we've recently accepted that it's a worthwhile platform for us to pursue.

**The blues runs deep all the way through your sound – was it always an element that you wanted to feature in your songs from the start?**

We've been blues fans since we were in our late teens. We played blues in our previous bands and knew that influence would continue with our new band since before our move to Nashville. We love the rawness of the sound – it's always felt very natural to us. We pull a lot of inspiration from Delta, jump, Chicago and Texas blues – from guitar tones and riffs to basslines and drum patterns. The unapologetic honesty in the lyrics has always been very moving to us as well, and we approach our own songwriting in the same unforgiving way.

**Which other musical genres do you feel have been important influences on your own songwriting?**

While blues is always the tops in our book, we're also huge fans of early rock'n'roll, country & western and folk. The storytelling in these genres has always been very inspiring to us. We pull bits and pieces from all these styles while songwriting, but early rock'n'roll has always been our greatest influence outside of blues. It's fascinating to see how early rock'n'roll artists reinterpreted the instrumentation of early blues music.

**How does it feel to have your *Knee High & Risin'* single out on vinyl? Is it an important format for you personally?**

It's a dream come true! We love the sound and aesthetic of vinyl, and plan to release more in future. We're obviously very influenced by the sounds of the 50s & 60s, and it just feels right to release our music in the same format that it would have been released on during that time. We've had

Shaking things up: The Hi-Jivers at home in Music City – Nashville, Tennessee



the pleasure of performing at numerous festivals and events where vinyl is still prevalent, and that's allowed us to tap into a fanbase of folks who are passionate about vinyl. We're looking forward to getting back to those events, but in the meantime you can grab a copy of our 45 on our website.

**Big Sandy claims that The Hi-Jivers “throb with excitement”. It's a great quote, but do you think it's an accurate description of your sound?**

What a treat it is to call Big Sandy a friend! He's been so supportive and encouraging. We adore him and his music. When we perform, we leave everything we've got on stage. We love what we do and we think it

shows. We're flattered by Big Sandy's quote and hope others feel the same way when they see us perform live!

**How does the future look for the band in these uncertain times?**

Like all the other musicians who've been affected by the pandemic, our career is currently a bit of a waiting game. We're grateful to be starting to play some local gigs again, but we really miss touring and festivals. We're keeping our heads up and looking forward to better times. ★

● ***Knee High & Risin'* is out now on Wild Records and reviewed on page 84. For details, visit [www.thehijivers.com](http://www.thehijivers.com)**



# Bill Taylor

**The Snearly Ranch Boy was part of the Sun Records 'house band'. He also co-wrote a song that gave Elvis his first taste of success.**

WORDS BY **BERNI BILKO**

**B**ill Taylor's recording career began as the vocalist with **Lucky White And His Band** through the song *Yo Yo Heart/One Of Your Lies* on **4 Star Records**. It was recorded at Sun Studio but held back by Sam Phillips, who was nervous about releasing what he considered 'hillbilly' music. When the Snearly Ranch Boys' frontman and trumpeter Ramsey Kearney was drafted in 1953, he suggested Bill as his replacement – and they soon became Sun Records' session band. After Elvis Presley's first three singles failed to catch the public's imagination, Phillips turned to Taylor, who co-wrote *I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone* with Stan Kesler. [Ed's note] Since this interview with Bill took place, Kesler died aged 92 at a hospice in Tennessee, following a battle with bone cancer.

## What got you into music?

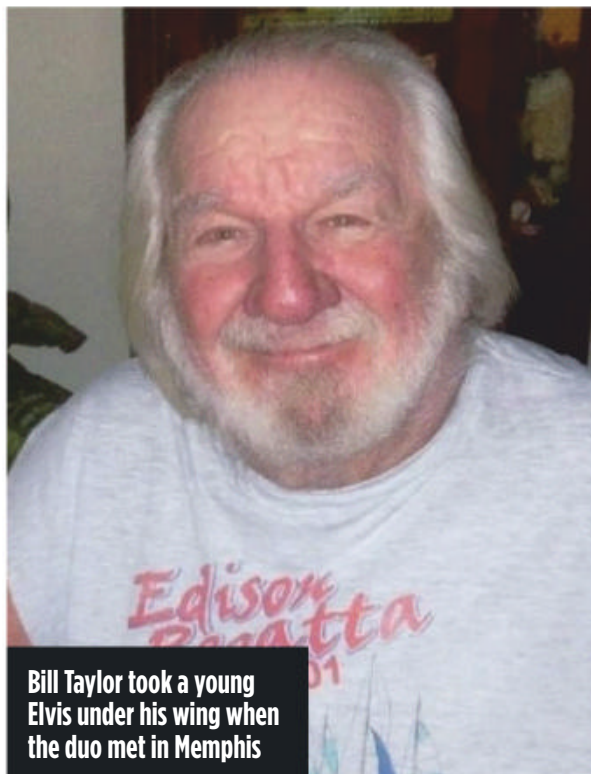
My stepfather was a wood trader and we moved around to wherever the timber was. I was raised in the Mississippi Delta and dad's workers were black people, I'd listen to them play. That's how I learned the blues. One year, I went to four schools. I was at Summerville High School in South Carolina. By the time I graduated, my parents had moved to Memphis! I was meant to be going to the University of Alabama, but fell in love with Memphis music.

## When did you learn trumpet?

I played saxophone in grade school – I was about 10 or 12 years old. When I got to Memphis State College, the requirement was to study another instrument, so I chose the trumpet. I was a pretty good saxophonist but always wanted to play trumpet. I had good teachers, I practised really hard and within a year I was playing professionally.

## Who did you play with?

My first band, when I was still at Memphis State College, was The Statesmen. I had Mickey D'More on piano. He was the first



Bill Taylor took a young Elvis under his wing when the duo met in Memphis

beatnik I ever met, a hippie who listened to jazz. His brother played keyboards for Gene Krupa and showed me some great chord changes. Everyone knew Mickey; he was strange, he wore an overcoat when it was 110 degrees. He taught me a lot, including how to smoke dope. Ace Cannon played sax and Johnny Bernero was on drums.

## Did The Statesmen make it into the studio to record anything?

I was seeing a girl whose father owned a wire recorder and we took it to a gig, turned it on, and let it run to see how we sounded. Then I took the recording and machine down to Memphis Recording Services. It was nothing special back then – they didn't even have the Sun logo up at that point. I was introduced to Sam Phillips, who said: "I can [work with] this, you've

got some good players here." Sam cut me a 10" acetate and added: "If I need good musicians, can I call y'all?" Sam took my number, but didn't call – nobody was using horns much, except those rocking black dudes, they had their own horn sections.

## Was music your full-time occupation?

I played two nights a week. The rest of the time I was working as a lifeguard in North Memphis. Elvis would come in and once he knew I was a musician I couldn't get him off my ass! He followed me to West Memphis. Whenever the Snearly Ranch Boys played the Cotton Club, we'd let him sit in. We didn't think much of Elvis, doing stuff like *Old Shep*, crap like that, but I really did like him. One day at the pool, I told him about the acetate and he said: "You know, it's my mother's birthday. I'd like to make a record." I explained to him that they had everything down at Memphis Recording Services. He went and recorded *My Happiness* and told me that it went well. Sam didn't have very sophisticated equipment, though. Maybe a two-track tape recorder and a Webcor patched together.

## How did you come to write for Elvis?

Stan Kesler, steel player with the Snearly Ranch Boys, was their main writer. We'd recorded *Split Personality/Lonely Sweetheart*, released on FLIP 502 in March 1955. Sam asked Stan to write something for Elvis to halt the decline in sales. Stan said to me: "We gotta write something for this guy." One night, I was in the bathtub and heard a Campbell's soup advert. It triggered me to write *I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone*. Later, I worked with Stan on it. I don't think we did a demo, we just played it. We sat in as Elvis, Scotty and Bill ran through it slow and bluesy at first, before finding the groove. The rest is history. Everything I've done in music traces back to Stan. He was a fine musician, a hit songwriter and producer as well as a great engineer. He was a big part of my life. My mentor, in fact. ★

**“Everything I’ve done in music traces back to Stan Kesler. He was a big part of my life... my mentor.”**





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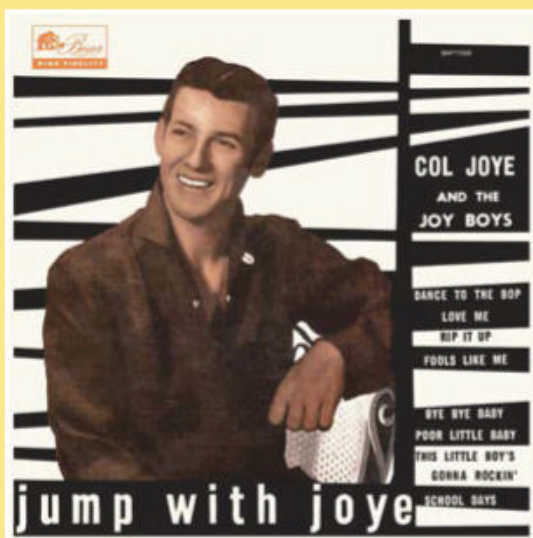
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A typically understated Little Richard warms up for the August '72 show at Wembley





# THE GREAT ROCK'N'ROLL REVIVAL

From the late 60s through the early 70s, the original rock'n'rollers returned with a mix of nostalgia shows and bold new recordings. High points included Wembley Stadium's first mega-gig and a revival of rockin' 50s culture across TV and movies. But why did it happen?

WORDS BY MICHAEL LEONARD

**T**hese days, revival acts, nostalgia tours and reliving days gone by make up one of music's biggest scenes, with the hits of the past having a bright future. But it wasn't always so. Pop culture is *expected* to keep moving, changing... and it did. Until the great rock'n'roll revival of the late 60s and early 70s, when, for many, the clock was turned back.

There was probably no single reason the wave of nostalgia spiked so dramatically, but there was a tide on the rise. In 1968, Elvis had returned to wild acclaim with his 'Comeback Special'; the deified Beatles were putting out retro tunes (*Back In The U.S.S.R.*, *Lady Madonna*) even as they splintered; and forgotten man Fats Domino issued the acclaimed *Fats Is Back* album, cannily covering *Lady Madonna*, a song he had inspired. *Fats Is Back* was an important LP: it didn't dump the essence of Domino's sound but smartly updated it. It proved the originals could still deliver without compromise.

A marker was laid down in, of all places, Canada. The Toronto Rock'n'Roll Revival show of September 1969 optimistically mixed 50s titans (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Bo Diddley and Jerry Lee Lewis) with hip acts such as The Doors, Chicago Transit Authority and nascent shock-rocker Alice Cooper. But it made big headlines, mainly because John Lennon and his new Plastic Ono Band gave what was the star's first live appearance without his Fab-mates. Lennon had been invited as compère, but it wasn't clear if he would perform. His set has become known (via the album release) as *Live Peace In Toronto 1969*, but Toronto was intended, really, as simply a rock'n'roll show.

South east in NYC, US promoter/radio man Richard Nader had grown up on the early rockers and was convinced there was a dedicated 'oldies' market just waiting to be





Chuck Berry is presented with a gold disc at the Rock and Roll Revival Show, Madison Square Garden, October 1972, by Chess Records' Esmond Edwards (left) and promoter Richard Nader



tapped. Nader had spent a few years promoting The Who, The Animals, Herman's Hermits and other UK groups in the US, and was irked that the American heroes of his youth had been swept aside by these British Invasion bands.

### THE COMEBACK BEGINS

In October 1969, Nader presented the first of his many rock'n'roll revivals at New York's vast Madison Square Garden. Unlike the pick and mix line-up in Toronto, this was more focused nostalgia and starred Berry, The Platters and – performing in the US for the first time in a decade – Bill Haley and his Comets. Amid the prevailing 'counter culture' of freakouts, druggy experimentalism and psychedelic funk, this was a brave call indeed.

To many people's surprise, including the acts involved, it was a massive success. "They [the artists] didn't think the public wanted to see them anymore," Nader later told journalist Gary James. "The Coasters' manager didn't believe I was gonna pull the show off, so he booked The Coasters elsewhere. Bill [Haley] was living in Mexico at the time. I spent hours over a period of months trying to convince him to come up and do the show. He hemmed and hawed. So I begged him, did whatever I had to do to get him."

Nader's drive was admirable and unwavering. He'd had to borrow the start-up money from an office furniture manufacturer in order to put on his first show, and Bill Haley wasn't the only star that he had to coax out of retirement. For one of his later 25 gigs at the Garden, Nader was determined to get Bo Diddley onto the bill, only to find out that the guitar slinger was by this time working in a restaurant attached to a garage because his car had broken down and he couldn't afford to get it repaired...

## THE REVIVAL WAS HITTING THE BIG TIME - AND IT WAS COMING ACROSS THE WATER

But before long, the shows had moved from MSG's Felt Forum to the Garden's 20,000-capacity Main Arena and – like a throwback to the days of Alan Freed – Nader's name was writ large on the posters as a guarantee of retro-rocking quality.

Within a few years, old was the new new, and some UK artists were also looking back: in 1970, Dave Edmunds charted with an unlikely cover of Smiley Lewis's *I Hear You*

*Knocking* from 1955, and Shakin' Stevens And The Sunsets cut the album *A Legend*. Produced by fellow Welshman Edmunds, it didn't sell too many, but they built a solid following in mainland Europe. The Sunsets' manager Paul Barrett was so impressed when reading of Lennon's appearance at the revival show in Toronto, he promptly wrote a letter to the music press inviting him to audition for The Sunsets. Of course, it didn't work, but Barrett's chutzpah impressed the Rolling Stones so much they gave Shaky and the band a support slot.

Outside of the A&R offices of London, New York and LA, where the latest pop fad was chased like a rabbit, there was clearly still an appetite for the music of 'yesterday'. After all, it had only been a decade since rock'n'roll ruled, so why should it now be written off as moribund?

Back in the USA, some record companies were wise to it. Reprise Records signed Little Richard in 1970 and he released the album, *The Rill Thing*, with the 7" *Freedom Blues* becoming his biggest single in years. He even made the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine, which would have been unimaginable two years earlier.

In 1971, disc jockey Jerry Osborne started an 'oldies' format on FM radio in Phoenix, Arizona, and it was so successful that others quickly emulated it across the States. In



LIVE AT THE  
TO PEACE FESTIVAL  
1969

LITTLE  
RICHARD

Chicago, a new musical by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey debuted, revisiting its authors' high school life: they called it *Grease*, after the greasers of the 50s. Within a year, it was playing on Broadway. The revival was hitting the big time... and it was coming across the water.

### ROCKERS RETURN TO THE UK

It was no surprise that a retro show had the potential to be huge in the UK. The original rock'n'roll pioneers *did* play the UK in the 50s, sure, but only to a switched-on smaller audience and rarely together. Even so, the London Rock and Roll Show of 1972 was a milestone event: it was the first time Wembley Stadium had been booked for a dedicated music gig.

Bar Elvis deciding to finally visit England, the line-up was as strong as any 50s rocker could realistically hope for: Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bo Diddley, Billy Haley and his Comets... It would have been even better, but The Platters, The Drifters and The Coasters couldn't sort out work permit issues. Hence, some of the eventual support card was baffling and unpopular (Detroit garage-rock noiseniks the MC5, The Glitter Band), but no-one had come to see them anyway.

The show took its cues from 50s 'revue' events in many ways, with relatively short

The Great Rock'n'Roll Revival



## FAB FOUR GET BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

Across the last 70 years of rock music, a cyclical pattern has emerged where excess and extravagance is replaced by a back-to-basics return to rootsy authenticity. Punk and neo-rockabilly supplanted the overblown indulgences of prog, while 20 years later the simplicity of The White Stripes, The Strokes and The Libertines pressed the reset button on the coked-up hubris of Britpop. Rewind further and you can trace the rock world's gradual tiring of psychedelia as the time when the spotlight returned to the 50s originators of rock'n'roll.

After the *Sgt. Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour* projects, the stripped-back 'White Album' was a stylistic *volte face* for The Beatles, one which they continued throughout their Get Back sessions in 1969. Tracks such as *One After 909* reached back to their earliest r'n'r roots, while *Two Of Us* was an Everly Brothers tribute in all but name ("Take it Phil," offers McCartney to Lennon as a reference in the coda of the *Anthology 3* outtake version).

Recording sessions for the resultant *Let It Be* album were fraught, but its ethos of a return to the band's early days meant they regularly warmed up (quite literally, the Twickenham studio they recorded in was freezing) with an array of rock'n'roll covers.

A three-song medley of Little Richard's *Rip It Up*, *Shake, Rattle And Roll*, made famous by Bill Haley, and Carl Perkins' *Blue Suede Shoes* appeared on *Anthology 3* and various song fragments are widely available on Beatle bootlegs and YouTube. It's also likely that we'll get to hear more covers in the forthcoming Peter Jackson reworking of the *Let It Be* movie, now pencilled in for the summer of 2021 after being delayed by the Covid pandemic.

Naturally enough, The Beatles dashed off numerous Elvis covers, including *All Shook Up*, *How Do You Think I Feel*, *Good Rockin' Tonight*, *(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care* and *Don't Be Cruel*.

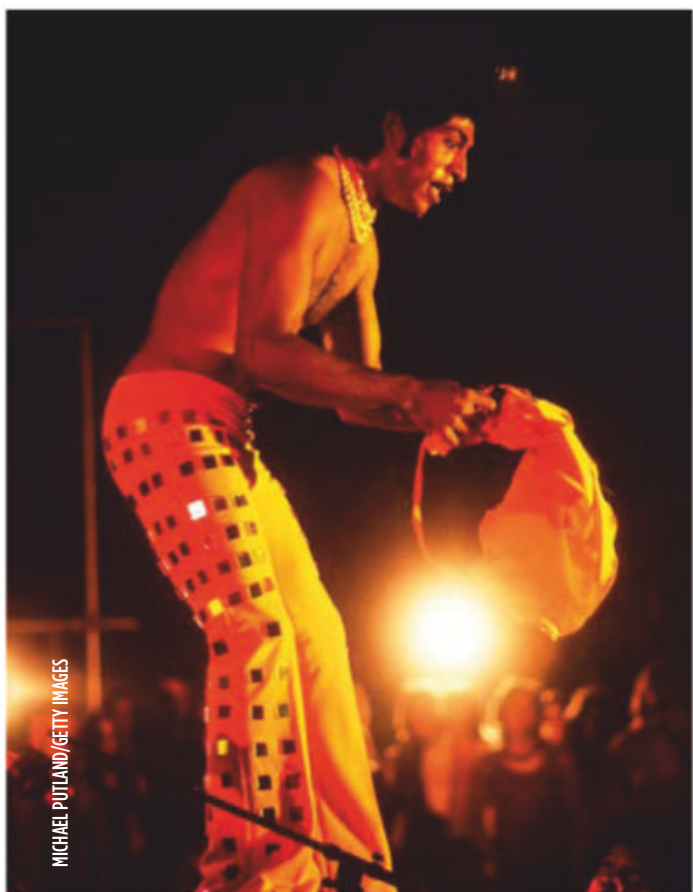
Elsewhere on the sessions, Chuck Berry was their favoured artist, the band covering an array of his material including *Johnny B. Goode*, *Almost Grown*, *Maybellene*, *Brown Eyed Handsome Man*, *Vacation Time* and *I'm Talking About You*.

George Harrison's idol Carl Perkins was also well catered for with *Gone, Gone, Gone*, *Your True Love*, *Right String*, *Wrong Yo-Yo* and *Sure To Fall (In Love With You)*. Also featured were covers of Buddy Holly – McCartney went on, of course, to buy the publishing rights to the star's back catalogue – Bo Diddley, Ronnie Hawkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Larry Williams, Screamin' Jay Hawkins and more.

The majority of the opening side of Lennon's *Rock 'N' Roll* LP would see him revisit tracks covered at the sessions – *Be-Bop-A-Lula*, *Stand By Me*, *You Can't Catch Me*, *Rip It Up* and *Sweet Little Sixteen* all made a reappearance on the 1975 Phil Spector co-produced effort. **Steve Harnell**







MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

sets. The audience was a mad mixture: a new generation of Teds, leather-clad rockers with skulls on their jackets, bikers, suedeheads, longhairs... and ordinary folk who just loved rock'n'roll.

It wasn't without faults. The stage lighting was so inadequate it was a wonder people at the back could see *anything*. And the sound wasn't great. But, back then, such enormous stadium shows were in their infancy.

Bill Haley played brilliantly. Even at 47, and after a long time missing in action, he and the Comets sounded on the money. Little Richard came on and announced himself "the king of rock'n'roll" (it was his latest album's title, after all) but he only had a small, five-piece band. He was also booed

## THE AUDIENCE WAS A MAD MIXTURE OF TEDS, LEATHER-CLAD ROCKERS, BIKERS AND SUEDEHEADS...

when he stopped playing just to stand on top of his piano, remove his mini vest and throw it to the crowd. When interviewed in Peter Clifton's concert film, Richard seemed rankled. Partly because his audience was by then – and not just at Wembley – almost exclusively white.

Later on, Richard reflected: "I think the sound system was bad. The last outdoor engagement I played, before Wembley, was at Atlantic City with Janis Joplin, and we had 60,000 people there. The sound outdoors is never all that good. You also have to take into consideration that



EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES



ANWAR HUSSEIN/GETTY IMAGES





The Wembley show saw a vibrant collision of youth culture groups; Inset far left, Little Richard goes topless for the stadium crowd



## THE LONDON CHUCK BERRY SESSIONS

### A HUMDRUM ALBUM BECOMES A HUGE HIT

Aside from headlining Wembley, 1972 was a fruitful year for Chuck Berry. He'd been back with Chess Records since 1969 (suitably calling his fine return LP *Back Home*), and after 1971's *San Francisco Dues* – six new songs, but weird in parts – the rocker was on a roll.

In February '72 he came to the UK and went into Marylebone's Pye Studios to cut new tracks with a band that included Kenney Jones and Ian McLagan of The Faces. In March, he also played a legendary 80-minute set at BBC Television Theatre, but the forthcoming LP's flipside was part of a show recorded at the Lanchester Arts Festival. At the conclusion of that set, the recording includes the sounds of management asking the audience to leave so that the hip Pink Floyd can take the stage... but the crowd begins chanting "We want Chuck!". *The London Chuck Berry Sessions* became Berry's best-selling LP.

In reality, the live side is shabby, but does boast a whole 12 minutes of *My Ding-A-Ling*. The innuendo-laden singalong wasn't wholly written by Berry – it was originally by Fats Domino sidekick Dave Bartholomew – so we can perhaps cut Chuck some slack, though for the Shakespeare of rock'n'roll, it's an awkward anomaly. Mary Whitehouse tried to get it banned: the notoriously miserly Chuck just revelled in the takings. The edited version of *My Ding-A-Ling* made UK No.1 in December '72, and was Chuck Berry's only 7" to top the charts on both sides of the Atlantic.



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGE



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Teddy boys assemble at the Wembley Stadium show in 1972 that featured Bill Haley (above left) and Jerry Lee Lewis (left)





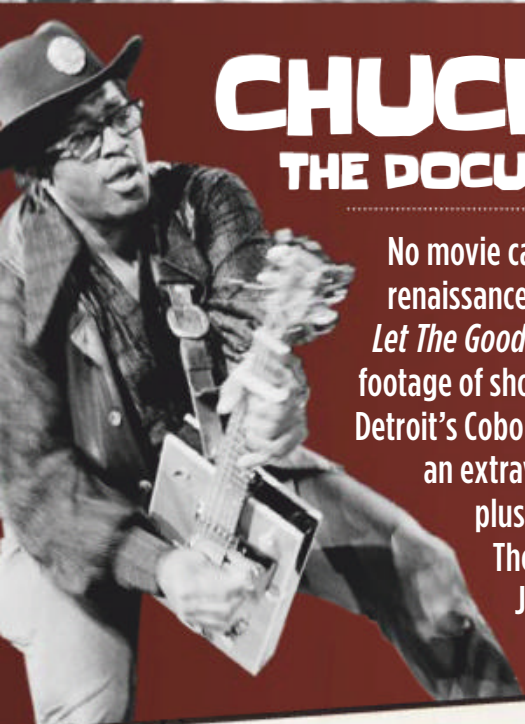
# CHUCK AND BO ROLL WITH IT

## THE DOCUMENTARY THAT CHRONICLED THE ROCKIN' REVIVAL

No movie captured the spirit of the 70s rockin' renaissance better than Robert Abel and Sidney Levin's *Let The Good Times Roll* from 1973. Splicing together footage of shows at Long Island's Nassau Coliseum and Detroit's Cobo Hall, the long-form documentary was an extravaganza of the scene's biggest hitters, plus a well-chosen undercard featuring The Shirelles, The Coasters, Danny & The Juniors and The Five Satins.

It's the A-list talent here, though, that marks this out for special mention. Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Little Richard all feature prominently, as well as Chubby Checker, Bill Haley and the Comets and Fats Domino. Filmed using the *de rigueur* rock doc split screen technique popularised by the *Woodstock* movie, *Let The Good Times Roll* ends with a rare and apparently impromptu duet between Berry and Diddley. Tom Zito of the *Washington Post* filed a glowing tribute, calling the doc "the first film to view rock'n'roll in its broad cultural perspective. The result may well be the best rock film yet."

A fine 2LP soundtrack album was released on Bell Records that reinstated full-length versions of songs truncated to fit the 99-minute running time of the movie. A major disappointment, though, was the omission for contractual reasons of all of Berry's performances – including the Bo Diddley duet. **SH**





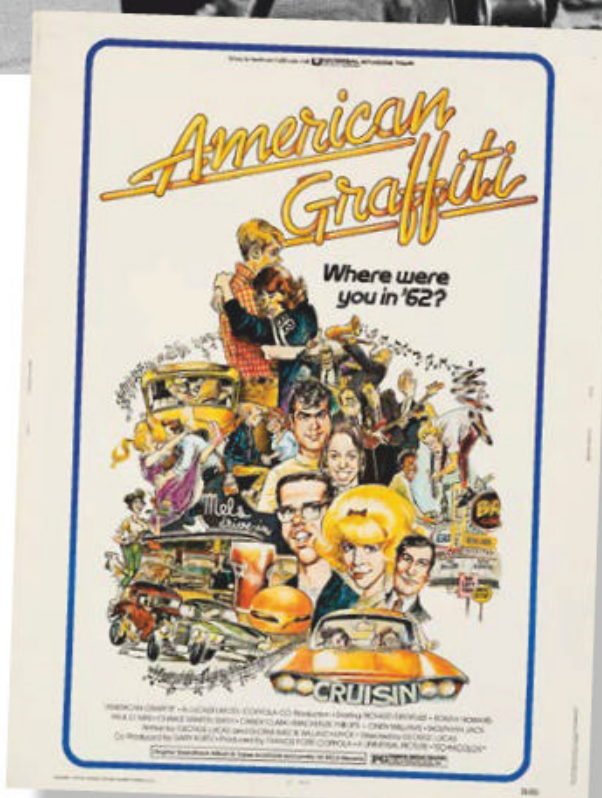
Richard Nader in New York during filming on *Let The Good Times Roll*



Wembley was not just a concert — a film was being made as well. We were told how to present certain things for the movie.”

The London Rock and Roll Show was carefully curated, true, but it was packed with hits. It didn't really reflect what the individual artists were then playing and recording, but that was the point. At no juncture were there the dreaded words: “And now, we'd like to play you some new songs...”

And the camaraderie between these comeback kings was strong. Berry comes onstage at Bo Diddley's finale to hold the guitar slinger's arm aloft in salutation. Richard said “it was like meeting old friends again”. And who says Chuck Berry was irascible? His winning smile at the end of the movie is as wide as the Missouri.



## HAPPIER DAYS

A rediscovered passion for early rock'n'roll was seeping into wider popular culture, too. A landmark came in the form of *American Graffiti*, the movie co-written and directed by George Lucas. It's actually set in 1962 (suburban culture

always takes a while to catch up), but the coming-of-age comedy was the unrivalled surprise hit of 1973.

A series of vignettes from one night in the life of Californian teenagers, it was produced on a \$777,000 budget, yet is now estimated to have made over \$200 million in box office and video sales. Stars included Wolfman Jack — the real-life DJ who had made his name on the illicit ‘border blaster’ radio stations that played R&B and early rock'n'roll — and a young Ron Howard.

## IN MUSIC, LOOKING BACK WAS NOW BECOMING PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE

Although not born until 1954, Howard would soon become a totem for 50s throwbacks as co-lead in the massively popular 50s-set sitcom *Happy Days*.

In music, looking back was now becoming perfectly acceptable... if perilous. Elton John scored his first US No.1 in 1973 with *Crocodile Rock*, though he and Bernie Taupin got sued by *Speedy Gonzales* writer Buddy Kaye. “I wanted it to be a record about all the things I grew up with,” admitted Elton. “Of course it's a rip-off, it's derivative in every sense of the word.”

John Lennon still had a burning passion for early rock'n'roll that came out on his 1975 covers album, called simply *Rock And Roll*. The genesis of that LP may have been a publishing dispute (see *Vintage Rock* issue 35), but Lennon's genuine affection for the uncomplicated rockin' of his childhood ➔



Chuck Berry's Wembley set was a blistering success that turned the clock back to the golden age



## **ROCK'N'ROLL WAS ORIGINALLY REBELLION ITSELF. IT NOW SOUNDED COMFORTING.**

is clear. Ringo Starr had actually got there first: he'd topped the US Hot 100 with a remake of Johnny Burnette's 1960 hit *You're Sixteen* two years previously, and Starr's 1970 album *Sentimental Journey* had gone even further, delving into pre-war songs and *stopping* at the 1950s.

At the pop end of the market, faux 50s-styled acts such as Showaddywaddy and Mud were soon invading the UK charts. In the US, Sha Na Na – the slightly surrealist 50s revivalists who'd performed immediately before Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock in 1969 – were still going strong and on their way to their own ratings-exploding US TV show. As they shout on their 1973 live album *The Golden Age Of Rock And Roll*, "We've got just one thing to say to you f\*\*\*in' hippies, and that is that rock'n'roll is here to stay!"

### **REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL**

Why did the revival happen? Well, the 60s was a decade of such upheaval, perhaps nothing felt certain anymore. The post-war boom of the 50s was a long time gone, and as the 70s dawned it had been replaced by Vietnam, boggling new fashions, bad drugs, strident sexual politics, race riots and 'heavy' music that sounded like doom. Although rock'n'roll was originally an outrageous rebellion itself, it now sounded positively comforting, optimistic and reliable. A *good* time. It's well known that in times of trouble, we yearn for the past... the turmoil of the changing world was addressed perfectly (if cryptically) by Don McLean on his massive hit of 1971, *American Pie*.

The late Richard Nader explained: "I think we become nostalgic when we're in a situation that we're not coping with. When people bumped up against the 1970s there were many things that made them very uncomfortable. Comfortable, secure, warm, accepted – that's all nostalgia is. All I did was give them the key, music of the 50s that made guys my age in the 70s comfortable and secure."

In the early 1970s, the 50s revival was strong. There'd be another revival in the wake of punk. A desire for a simpler time? A way of retaining an older audience in 'pop'? Or, maybe, a whole lotta people realised that 50s music was simply more fun... ★



# THE COMEBACK KINGS

## FIVE ROCK'N'ROLL LEGENDS MIXING THE TRAD AND THE RAD



### JERRY LEE LEWIS

#### ANOTHER PLACE ANOTHER TIME

##### SMASH RECORDS (1968)

Jerry Lee's frantic piano pounding was sounding pretty dated by the late 60s and the hits had long since dried up, so with 1968's *Another Place Another Time* he found the balls of fire to reinvent himself – as a country artist. It made total sense. The hippie ideals of love, peace and harmony were never a good fit for a man tortured by devils and booze, but the bruised anguish of country was a natural truckstop. Yet even though hardcore country was flying commercially in 1968, this was no 'easy cash-in' record: it sounds absolutely desperate at times. However, the title track and *What's Made Milwaukee Famous (Has Made A Loser Out Of Me)* were hit singles, and the whole LP turned Jerry Lee's career around.

### CARL PERKINS

#### ON TOP

##### COLUMBIA (1969)

The undervalued genius of rockabilly hadn't attempted an album of new material in a decade before this, but he'd obviously been saving up the goodness. Some argue it was clearly based on Elvis's multi-style 'Comeback Special' of 1968 – here's CP playing some blues (*Baby, What You Want Me To Do?*), straight-up rock'n'roll (*C.C. Rider, Brown Eyed Handsome Man*), and a few originals such as *Power Of My Soul*. *Champaign, Illinois* was a collaboration with Bob Dylan (dating from the same year's *Nashville Skyline* sessions) showing the high regard in which Perkins was still held. Carl was never a strong album artist to any great extent, but this enhanced his reputation for people who thought that he was a three-hit wonder from 1956.



### CHUCK BERRY

#### BACK HOME

##### CHESS (1970)

With his return to the Chess label, Chuck Berry busied himself reviving the thrilling sounds and wordplay that had made him such a star in the 1950s. *Tulane, Have Mercy Judge* and *I'm A Rocker* were the standout moments in a short, 30-minute jolt of rockin' – although the inspiration didn't really last throughout his second tenure: with Leonard Chess by this point departed, the label was soon run with much less freewheeling abandon, and the following *San Francisco Dues* tried not entirely successfully to shoehorn Chuck into a more modern box. Some of *Back Home* is classic, though: from *Tulane's* musings on the rise of hippiedom (Chuck didn't "get it") to *...Judge* being possibly the best blues number Berry ever cut.



### LITTLE RICHARD

#### THE RILL THING

##### REPRISE (1970)

*The Rill Thing* was Little Richard's most concerted effort at a comeback album since his first 'retirement' back in 1957, but it didn't simply pick up where he'd left off. A single, *Freedom Blues*, had given him his first

notable hit in five years (although the standalone 7" wasn't included on the original LP), but elsewhere Richard goes for a Cajun country-rock feel on *Lovesick Blues*, and the title track is a slow 10-minute funk instrumental on which you're hard pressed to pick out his piano. But at 37, he's still singing mighty fine and if the record was only a modest performer sales-wise, it showed that there was a lot more to Richard than a-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-lop-bam-booms.

### BO DIDDLEY

#### THE BLACK GLADIATOR

##### CHECKER RECORDS/GRT (1970)

"I just decided to do somethin' different. Everybody was wearin' funny lookin' crap – Isaac Hayes had come out [on stage] with chains an' stuff on, an' it was kinda flowin'... so I got me some belts an' stuff, an' said I was The Black Gladiator." Yup. As such, *The Black Gladiator* – Bo's first recording in five years – isn't really a rock'n'roll record, it's freaky funk. But with wailing organ and tight drums underpinning those Bo rhythms, it's a thoroughly rad leap forward into the 70s. Like Muddy Waters' *Electric Mud*, it's certainly not for everyone, but it's hard to dislike a record that begins with Bo claiming he invented elephants and ends with him singing opera.





# RETURN OF THE KILLER

**By the 1970s, Jerry Lee Lewis was back on top, in both country music and rock'n'roll. In an exclusive interview, the Killer talks us through the comeback decade when everything he touched turned to gold...**

WORDS BY DOUGLAS McPHERSON

**F**or the first seven years of the 1960s, Jerry Lee Lewis swam against the tide of changing fashion. In 1964, he recorded two explosive live albums. *Live at the Star Club, Hamburg* is cited by some as the greatest live LP ever, and *The Greatest Live Show On Earth* wasn't far behind it for power. But the latter's calling card single, *High Heel Sneakers*, reached only No.95 on the pop charts as a new generation clamoured for The Beatles and The Rolling Stones.

Lewis' commercial fortunes swung around in 1968 when the now grown-up pianist cut the mature barroom weeper *Another Place Another Time* and rode it to No.4 on the country chart. A string of country hits followed, including *To Make Love Sweeter For You*, his first No.1 since *Great Balls Of Fire* a decade earlier.

"It felt good," Lewis tells *Vintage Rock* of his return to the top. "It didn't seem like anything could stop me now."

But was the Killer content cranking out country ballads, or was he itching to record rock'n'roll again? The 85-year-old entertainer is unequivocal: "both!"

In the month that *Another Place Another Time* was released (March 1968) Lewis grew a moustache and goatee beard and took an unexpected detour into musical theatre to play the villainous Iago in *Catch My Soul*, a hip reimagining of Shakespeare's *Othello*, at the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles.

"It was great," says Lewis, whose rendition of two songs from the show, plus some of his drawling dialogue, can be found on the 1991 Electrovert album *The Killer's Private Stash*. "I already knew some Shakespeare, but being able to learn it and study it for the show meant a lot to me," he adds. "It came off real good!"

The six-week production was the brainchild of Jack Good, producer of Britain's pioneering rock'n'roll TV show, *Oh Boy!*, and the 1960s American show *Shindig*, on which Lewis made several incendiary appearances during his years of absence from the charts.

"Jack was a pure genius who was ahead of the whole game," says the Killer. As to whether he would have liked to have done more acting, "Well, I guess so. I never really thought about it. Man, I was just ready to get

back on the road. Being on stage for the play got my blood pumpin' for more. I had to get back to work."

That schedule included an appearance in front of 20,000 hippies at the Toronto Rock'n'roll Revival in 1969. On a bill with Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Bo Diddley, John Lennon and The Doors, Lewis ignored country hits, such as *What's Made Milwaukee Famous (Has Made A Loser Out Of Me)* and served up a set of straight rock'n'roll, including versions of Elvis' *Don't Be Cruel*, *Hound Dog* and *Mystery Train*.

Clad in a black T-shirt, the by then dark-haired Lewis was in his physical prime. As he danced across the stage singing *Jailhouse Rock*, the parallels with Elvis' '68 Comeback Special were obvious.

Immediately before the Toronto festival, Lewis had hung out with Presley backstage during the latter's engagement at the International Hotel in Las Vegas. So did the Killer and the King often sing together privately over the years? "When we'd come across each other, we would," he reveals. "Mercy, those were some times."

In Toronto, Lewis borrowed the guitar of his bandleader Kenny Lovelace for a race through *Mystery Train*. "During those years I'd pick up the guitar from time to time," he says. "Kenny being able to pick up his fiddle and let me play his guitar was great. Truly, we had some fun during those tours."

Did Lewis feel, at that point, as if he had two different audiences: the country



Jerry with sister Linda Gail, with whom he cut 1969's *Together* duets album









The Killer performs on the NBC TV show *Midnight Special* in 1973



Lighting up a cigar backstage at London's Palladium in April 1972



Jerry Lee worked with guitarist Rory Gallagher on a version of the Stones' *Satisfaction* while in the UK

## LONDON CALLING

*The story behind The Session*

In 1973, Lewis flew to London to record *The Session*, a sprawling double album, with a host of British musicians including guitarists Albert Lee, Peter Frampton and Rory Gallagher, bassist Chas Hodges – later the piano-playing half of Chas & Dave – and pedal steel guitarist B.J. Cole.

“Everyone was in awe of Jerry Lee,” Albert Lee remembered. “He maintained his persona as the tough guy. He’d walk in with his bottle of whiskey and his cigars, put them on the piano, and God help anyone who touched them!”

Over four January days at Advision studio, Lewis tackled two new rock songs, *Jukebox* and *Music To The Man*. He also covered Creedence Clearwater Revival’s *Bad Moon Rising* and made an aborted stab at the Stones’ *Satisfaction*.

But with little advance preparation, this was largely a jam session in which the participants fell back on familiar rock’n’roll standards: *Johnny B. Goode*, *Memphis, Tennessee* as well as a medley of Little Richard songs.

A highlight was a bluesy seven-minute romp through *Be-Bop-A-Lula*. How did that come about? “Accidentally!” Lewis laughs. Looking back at *The Session* as a whole, he says, “It was done too quick. Great musicians, great everything, it was all great, but we just couldn’t get it together how I wanted. They were all fantastic guys. If we coulda had more time to get in the groove with each other, that album could’ve been even better.”

Despite Lewis’ reservations, *The Session* rocked as hard as anything he’d cut and was a commercial success. A fire-breathing version of *Drinking Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee* hit No.41 in the charts, while the album reached No.37 – his highest entry until *Young Blood* in 1995.



people and the rock'n'roll people? "They're the same people!" he declares. "My music brings everyone together. No matter what, we're going to rock."

What about in Europe, where few fans were familiar with his country comeback? "Oh, they got familiar with it real quick!" Lewis laughs. By the time he played the London Rock'n'Roll Show at Wembley, with Richard, Berry and Bill Haley in 1972, however, he was aware of a resurgence of interest in the music of the 50s.

"I think it had been building for a while and when I got back over they were ready for it. Yeah, man, you could notice it. The people wanted more and I was happy to give it to 'em!"

Country music had always been part of Lewis' repertoire, even during his first blush of rock'n'roll fame. When country radio rediscovered him in 1968, Shelby Singleton, the new owner of Sun, realised that Lewis had left dozens of country recordings in the vault in the 50s.

Singleton began releasing ballads such as *Invitation To Your Party*, *One Minute Past Eternity* and *I Can't Seem To Say Goodbye*. The DJs and fans couldn't tell the old songs from the new ones and suddenly there were two labels releasing Top 5 Jerry Lee Lewis hits at the same time.

By 1972, after 17 country smashes in a row, Lewis was ready to prove he could still rock and roll with the aptly named album, *The Killer Rocks On*. Wrapped in scintillating strings, the disc found Lewis pounding his piano through songs including Kris Kristofferson's *Me And Bobby McGee*, Charlie Rich's *Lonely Weekends* and Fats Domino's *I'm Walkin'* with such elan that the covers might have been originals written especially for him.

The highlight was a chart-topping reinvention of the Big Bopper's *Chantilly Lace* that opened with a heart-stopping yell of "Hel-lo, you good lookin' thing you! This is the Killer speaking!" The three-week country chart-topper became one of his most famous recordings.

"*Chantilly Lace* was Jud Phillips' idea," says Lewis of Sam Phillips' promoter brother and long-standing member of Jerry Lee's management team. "I didn't even know the song that well. So I did one take on it and made up what I didn't know! All the songs on that album are pretty great, but *Chantilly Lace* really came off good."

The song was recorded live with the band and string section, but having such a full studio didn't faze the Killer. "I was used to it

and it was just another day at the studio for me. Music is my love."

The rock guitar accompaniment of *The Session* (see panel) provided a very different vibe to *The Killer Rocks On*, and Lewis found another sound again when he headed to Memphis in the autumn of '73 to make the soul and R&B flavoured *Southern Roots*.

The three-day recording session was one long party, with attendees passed out on the studio floor, but produced some incredible music, including *When A Man Loves A Woman* and *Hold On I'm Coming*. The standout was the frantic, double entendre-packed Mack Vickery composition *Meat Man*, which was too far out for radio play but an immediate favourite among Lewis' fans.

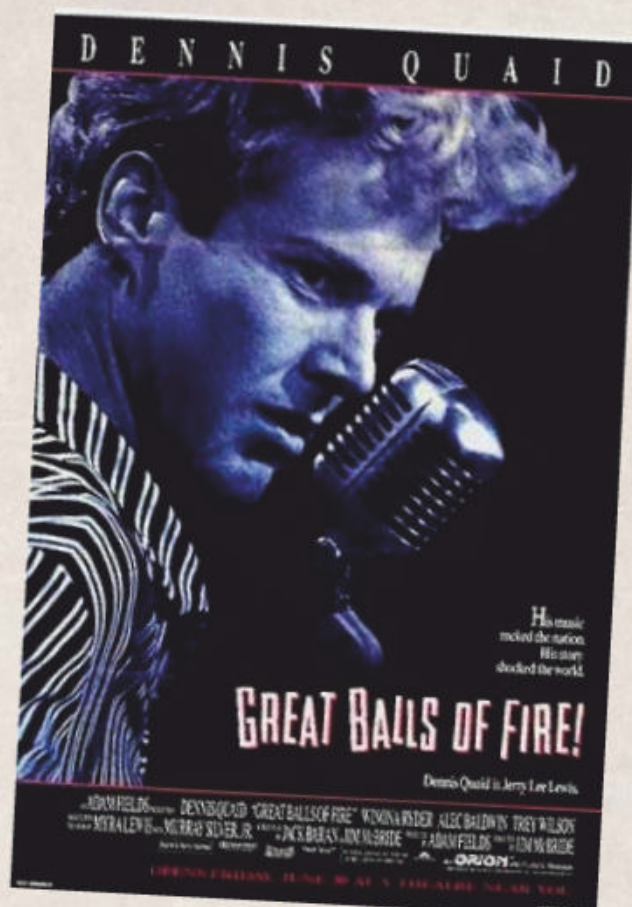
"I wasn't too fond of it," the singer confesses, "but I loved Mack, so I cut it for him and when we were done I said, 'I think that's good, let's not do it again. Cut it!'"

## **"I can't complain too bad. I just celebrated my 85th birthday. The Lord watches over me."**

For the rest of his time on Mercury, Lewis cut mainly country, including the 1977 hit *Middle Age Crazy*, a Sonny Throckmorton song with a storyline so powerful that it was made into a movie starring Bruce Dern.

However, by the time he switched labels to Elektra in 1979, the Killer was ready to rock again on an album produced in Hollywood by Bones Howe. "Bones!" Lewis exclaims. "Wow, I hadn't thought about him in a while. Great, great man. He helped put some of my songs into movies." The non-album track (*Hot Damn*) *I'm A One Woman Man* was released on the soundtrack of the Meat Loaf movie *Roadie* in 1980.

With the piano mixed up-front, James Burton on guitar and the Ron Hicklin Singers providing backing vocals, the disc Howe produced was pure class, with material ranging from Charlie Rich's *Who*



*Will The Next Fool Be*, to Bob Dylan's *Rita May*, Throckmorton's *I Wish I Was Eighteen Again* and, Lewis' favourite track, Jesse Stone's *Don't Let Go*. Most lasting was Mack Vickery's *Rockin' My Life Away*.

"Mack was one of the best songwriters I ever met," Lewis states.

"My God, that man could write a song!"

The self-titled album is widely regarded as one of Lewis' best and, as the man himself puts it, "I don't think there was anything better to call it!"

In the 40 years since, Lewis has never failed to generate excitement, from the 1989 biopic *Great Balls of Fire!* to his 2006 duets album *Last Man Standing* – his biggest seller yet – and 2014 biography *Jerry Lee Lewis: His Own Story*, by Rick Bragg.

The snowy-haired legend continued to entertain packed crowds until a stroke in February 2019, but says his health is on the mend. "It's been coming around good! Lots of therapy and resting has helped a lot."

Future projects include the release of a gospel album recorded in January 2020. "Oh man, we've got a great cut of *Life's Railway To Heaven* that I really love. I don't want to give too much of it away, though. It's going to be great. Really a love letter to the fans who enjoy my gospel songs."

Also in the works is a documentary about Lewis' life, although the project was hit by the suicide of producer Steve Bing in June. "It's kind of on hold," says Lewis. "It was a passion project that my dear friend Steve was working on, Lord rest his soul. We're trying to figure out what the best way to finish it would be, whether it be to turn it into a documentary or more of a movie." Bing had met Lewis in the 80s and developed a close friendship with the singer, co-producing *Last Man Standing*.

In the meantime, how has rock's eternal wildman found the enforced lockdown? "It's a drag, but it's necessary. We have to look out for each other in this world. But I can't complain too bad. I've been blessed with extra time at home with my family and I just celebrated my 85th birthday! The Lord watches over me." ★



# Kenny Lovelace

**Jerry Lee Lewis' guitarist and fiddle player on 1969's Toronto Rock'n'roll Revival, Elvis in Vegas and the Killer's future plans**

WORDS BY DOUGLAS McPHERSON

**F**or 53 years, Kenny Lovelace has been Jerry Lee Lewis' right-hand man. Born in Alabama, Lovelace became Lewis' band leader, guitarist and fiddle player in 1967. He's accompanied the Killer for every one of his concerts, recording sessions and television appearances ever since.

**Soon after you joined Jerry Lee's band, you played the Toronto Rock'n'Roll Revival in 1969. What do you remember about it?**

That was really something else. They had Chuck Berry, John Lennon and Yoko Ono. There were thousands of people there and they were up for it. The highlight for me was playing rock'n'roll fiddle on *Mystery Train*. Jerry said, 'Can I borrow your guitar?' I said, 'Sure!' So Jerry played electric guitar. He gave me a solo on the fiddle and I just went for it. I've seen some clips and thought, 'Gol-ly!' It was rockin', y'know?

**In Toronto, Jerry Lee told the audience that he had just come back from seeing Elvis in Las Vegas. What was that like?**

We were up in Columbus, Ohio, when Elvis called Jerry and said, "Is there any way you could come and see my first comeback show at the International Hotel, and let me know what you think?" So we went. Elvis said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have a great rock'n'roll entertainer with us tonight. I'm so happy he's come to see us: Mr Jerry Lee Lewis!" Everybody stood up, applauding. After the show, Elvis brought us backstage and Jerry told him what a great show he'd done. Elvis had a piano in his dressing room and said, "Jerry, would you mind sitting down and hitting a few notes?" So Jerry reeled off some stuff. Elvis had his arm propped on the piano, and he and Jerry were looking at each other, having a good time. I wish I had a camera that night!

**At that point in the late 60s and early 70s, when Jerry Lee was having hit after hit**



2019 was tough for Kenny and the Killer, but they're back with a new album

**on the country charts, was he content making country records, or was he itching to record rock'n'roll again?**

Well, Jerry wanted to get into the country market. He grew up listening to the Grand Ole Opry. He loved Hank Williams and the old country artists. So when he cut *Another Place Another Time*, he really got into country for a while. But he mixed country and rock'n'roll in his concerts. It took a while, especially in Europe, for the hardcore rock'n'rollers to accept his country songs, but later they did and it got to where he could do his country and rock'n'roll together.

**He also rocked up songs from the 1920s, like *Margie* and *Sweet Georgia Brown*...**

Me and Jerry grew up on those old songs. When I first went with him, we'd do 26

**"Jerry reeled off some stuff, Elvis had his arm propped on the piano. I wish I had a camera that night."**

shows a month, travelling 400 or 500 miles a day, do two shows, sleep some, then go to the next town. Me and Jerry, his road manager Cecil Harrelson and his security guard Dick West used to travel in a black '66 Lincoln Limousine. Me, Cecil and Dick would all take turns driving. But on the last day of the tour, Jerry would always want me to sit in the back with him. I'd have my fiddle and he had a flat top guitar and we'd sing those old songs – Al Jolson, Hank Williams, *Margie* and all that stuff – all the way back to Memphis.

**What did you make of Britain's Teddy boys when you first saw them?**

The first time I went to Europe, it was a really high stage and the Teddy boys were trying to climb it. Jerry said, 'I'll tell ya, them cats rock, don't they?' In Manchester, they all got on the stage and surrounded the piano, dancing and going crazy. Jerry just kept rockin'.

**What has the next year got in store for you and the Killer?**

2019 was a pretty rough year for both of us. Jerry had a stroke and it affected his right hand and arm. He didn't play piano for a long time. I had a knee replacement, then found out I had lung cancer that needed surgery and chemo. Thank the Lord, I've had good reports since then. But in January this year we went into the studio and made a Gospel album. Jerry wasn't going to play, but they had everything set up around the piano, so he started twiddling around with his left hand, and then he played a little bit with his right hand, which he hadn't tried since his stroke. He enjoyed that session and we did 12 songs. I'm not sure when it's coming out. I don't know whether we'll get back on the road, though. Jerry's 85 now and I'm 84. With the Covid-19 situation, we have to be careful. At our age, we don't need to catch it. Never say never, but I don't think we'll travel much anymore. We'll have to see how he feels. ★



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**Joe Meek, the studio pioneer who made pop symphonies in his living room**



# Storm In A Tea Chest

**After Joe Meek's death, the tapes that held all his legendary recordings were sold off as a job lot. Now, after 52 long years in storage, this near-mythical collection – the so-called Tea Chest Tapes – has finally resurfaced.**

WORDS BY GARY TIPP

**B**ack in the mid-60s, along with his keyboard-playing brother Ken, bassist Cliff Cooper was in a group called **The Millionaires**. Previously known as The Rocking Chairs, the swanky new moniker came courtesy of none other than Joe Meek, who produced the band in his legendary Holloway Road home studio in North London.

A fruitful session spawned a hit single, *Wishing Well*, which made it to the upper reaches of the charts in September 1966. The group were subsequently booked in to record a follow-up, but fate intervened when a crazed Meek shot himself in the head with a shotgun some five months later on 3 February 1967.

Not only handy on the bass, Cooper was also a whizz at electronics design and went on to carve out a hugely successful career for himself in the music business as the founder of Orange Amps, the respected UK guitar amplification company. It was around the time of Meek's violent demise that he was setting up his first venture, Orange Studios.

Cooper takes up the story: "In the period after Joe died, I thought it would be great if we could buy some of his equipment. I was put in touch with Joe's solicitor, who told me that the studio kit had already been sold." But the phone call didn't end there. "He then mentioned that he had some other things of Joe's if I'd like to see them, so I

made an appointment. He was this stern, old-fashioned man and he started grilling me with lots of questions about myself. Eventually, I asked why I was being given the third degree, and he said, 'Mr Cooper, I have a situation'."

It was then he revealed to Cooper that as Meek's executor he was in possession

them because that's all copyrighted. I told him I'd like to listen to them and perhaps even record over them because tape was expensive in those days."

Cooper continues: "I went over to collect them in Balham from an old warehouse. I took an old Bedford van over there, but had to make four or five journeys' worth, as

I didn't realise just how many there were. The tea chests took up a lot of room. There were 67 in total, jammed full of tapes loosely stored, just thrown in the chests. I put them in our basement studios."

So, the legend of Joe Meek's Tea Chest Tapes begins.

## HAVE I THE RIGHTS?

As well as Meek's precious master recordings of his established stable of artists, such as The Tornados, John Leyton, Mike Berry, Glenda Collins, Heinz, and The Honeycombs, this near-mythical collection also includes previously unheard songs by David Bowie's first band The Konrads, as well as demos by Ray Davies, Georgie

Fame, Jonathan King, Alvin Lee, Gene Vincent, Rod Stewart, Steve Marriott and an early line-up of the band who became Status Quo. There's even a demo tape of a wannabe star Mark Feld, before he switched names to the far more glam Marc Bolan.

Remarkably, the tapes stayed in Cooper's custodianship for 52 years, much to the chagrin of any number of fanatical fans, ➔



of the tapes that held the entire catalogue of the producer's recorded output, both master recordings and demo sessions. "I'll always remember," says Cooper, "he told me his instructions were to destroy them because they'd be a legal nightmare, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He then offered them to me for £400, but only if I bought the physical reels and not what's on



**“I’m getting older and needed to find the tapes a home... Cherry Red is famous for doing it right, they’re a caring company”**

CLIFF COOPER



ALAMY



who, through a series of irregular yet vocal protests, demanded that the tapes be made readily available to all – rather than waste away in a damp warehouse near the back of beyond. At times, Cooper took a lot of stick for holding onto the tapes, but his genuine concern about the content always checked him from rushing into a deal that he wasn’t entirely happy with.

It took a chance meeting between Cooper and Iain McNay, the founder of the independent record label Cherry Red, to finally resolve this storm in a tea chest. “I met Cliff originally at an awards ceremony at the Roundhouse six years ago,” states McNay. “It was one of those events

where you just get put on a table and you don’t necessarily know the people you’re sitting with. I got chatting to this guy who was sitting across from me and it was Cliff. He was there because of Orange and we just started talking about Joe Meek. He knew Cherry Red had put out some Joe Meek compilations, then I realised he was the guy who owned the tapes. And it was then I said to him, ‘I’d really like to buy them from you’. The process took a while, but we

got there in the end.” After all this time, Cooper is both delighted and relieved to have finally done a deal for the tapes, and, presumably, to free up some floor space in his warehouse at the same time. But why did doing a deal take so long, and is there any sadness in seeing them go?

“No. I’m pleased to be handing them over. It was time. I had to do something with them. I’m getting older and I needed to find the tapes a home. This deal came easily. I’ve tried to do deals with the tapes before, but something always happened that stopped it until now. It wasn’t money. I just wanted them to be released properly.

“I didn’t feel as though I could go to the





The tapes include recordings of The Konrads featuring David Bowie (pictured bottom right)

big record companies,” Cooper adds, “as they would just want to release the big artists and the rest would get buried. Cherry Red is famous for doing it right, they’re a caring company.”

### INHERITING THE MEEK

McNay, a Joe Meek fan as a teenager, confirms his label is attached to the project for the long haul. “There’s nothing straightforward with this project and that’s part of the fun. Before we can think about releasing any boxsets, we need to get the tapes digitised, then we need to go through them all methodically and discover exactly what we’ve got. In itself, that’s an 18-month process. We aim to document every step of the tape transfer and digitisation process on our YouTube channel and website.

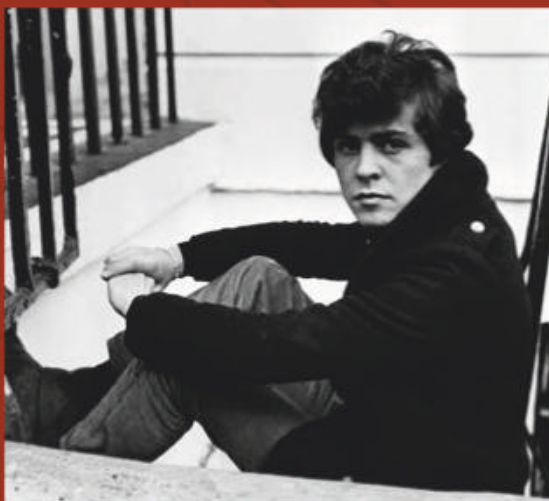
“Clearing the rights will also be a big issue, as any recordings that were released commercially will still be owned by record companies. If not released, then you need to track down the artist or their estate, which is even more challenging when you don’t know exactly who the artist is. We enjoy digging around. We can normally track people down.”

## On the path to stardom

As well as containing the master recordings of Joe Meek’s officially released output, the tapes also boast any number of demo tracks cut in his home studio at 304 Holloway Road. These previously unheard sessions feature a host of future stars including...

### David Bowie

As a member of The Konrads, the young David Jones sang and played sax on *Mockingbird*, the Inez & Charlie Foxx standard.



### Billy Fury

Never intended for a commercial release, Meek would sometimes tape Fury’s rehearsals for reference purposes.

### Tom Jones

The Welsh legend recorded seven tracks for Meek before hitting it big with Decca instead. Two of the tracks feature Ritchie Blackmore on guitar.

### Ten Years After

Guitar hero Alvin Lee recorded at Holloway Road shortly after a stint at Hamburg’s Star Club.

### Steve Marriott

The Small Face recorded with Meek as a 16-year-old on a track called *Love Gone Away*.

### Rod Stewart

Rod auditioned for Meek in 1961 as part of The Raiders. Joe liked the group, but Rod was deemed surplus to requirements.

### Freddie Starr

Along with his band The Moonlighters, the hamster-biting comedian regularly visited the Holloway Road studio.

### Status Quo

Francis Rossi’s pre-Quo group had several monikers, and recorded at Holloway Road around 1963. Meek didn’t sign them, but did suggest they should change their name to The Palominos.

### Marc Bolan

The young Mark Feld (above) recorded the track *Mrs Jones* with Joe Meek as a 15-year-old in 1963.

### Gene Vincent

Vincent appeared in the movie *Live It Up!* along with Heinz. Joe Meek produced a spin-off single *Temptation Baby* released on Columbia.

### Ray Davies

Ray wrote some songs for The Honeycombs and went along to Holloway Road to prepare demos.

### Georgie Fame

There are recordings of Fame performing *High School Confidential* and *Living Doll*.

One person Cherry Red did get on board immediately was rockabilly legend Alan Wilson from Western Star Studios, who has been given the epic job of preserving, digitising and cataloguing all 1,800-plus tapes. Although his working relationship with Cherry Red is already long-established, Wilson is also a dyed-in-the-wool Meek obsessive, who has not only produced and recorded John Leyton and Mike Berry, but released three Joe Meek tribute albums as a recording artist in his own right. His enthusiasm for the project is boundless.

You can sense the passion in Wilson’s voice when quizzed about the tapes. “When I was a kid I was a fanatical record collector of mostly 50s and 60s vinyl,” he says.

“I was always interested in the way music sounded and realised early on that some records had a sense of urgency and sounded great, while others just didn’t. Eventually, it dawned on me that most of the great sounding ones in my collection were produced by this guy called Joe Meek.”

The importance of Meek in the development of popular music in the UK should not ever be underestimated, which is the reason these tapes are such a precious commodity.

He was the first man to start his own independent record label (Triumph), at a time when the music business was dominated by the majors. He then built a recording studio in his home, and was





The full collection runs to more than 1,800 tapes

## High society

### The news they'd dreamed of

Pete Rochford, the current chairman of the Joe Meek Society, was stunned when he was told the news about the Tea Chest Tapes.

"I just could not believe what I was hearing, bearing in mind that the Joe Meek Society over the past 30 years has been waiting for this news with great patience," he explains.

"The complete catalogue of Joe's entire work is of massive interest to many people all over the world, which comes highly on a vast amount of record collectors' lists.

"These tapes of demos, backing tracks and unreleased or alternative versions will certainly be an eye-opener to collectors.

"Our special thanks go out to Cliff Cooper for allowing all the tapes to be given a whole new lease of life, Cherry Red Records for taking on the tapes to continue to keep them all safe and protected and also to Alan Wilson for his huge role in the long process of transferring them onto a format that will continue to keep their future prolonged.

"The Joe Meek Society give our special thanks to all involved and wish them every success."



Detective work will be needed to find the real artists on wrongly-labelled tapes

producing million-selling hits that were recorded in his living room. Not only that, but he always worked on a shoestring budget. What Joe Meek did with the resources he had was incredible.

A genuine trailblazer, Meek was always one step ahead of the game, as Wilson explains: "Joe was a pioneer when it came to recording techniques. His close mic'ing of a drum kit was revolutionary. Previously, producers would just stick one overhead mic above the drumkit and the drummer would have to balance himself out through his playing. Whereas, Joe Meek would mic up the drums individually, and so while I'm listening to these tapes now, more than ever I'm noticing the trademark Joe Meek drum sound. You can always tell a Joe Meek

recording because it fills the speaker, it jumps out and fills the room."

It would have been a cruel injustice if Wilson hadn't got assigned to the project, such is his reverence for Joe Meek. "I got the initial call from Cherry Red in lockdown. I had no idea that the deal was going through, but apparently it had been ticking over for six years. It was subject to an NDA, so they couldn't really tell me until they had to. Iain McNay called me about something else, then almost as a 'by the way', he asked me if I'd ever heard of the Tea Chest tapes. To which I replied, 'Of course, I have!'"

The emphatic response meant Wilson was tasked with the responsibility of inspecting the tapes at Cooper's warehouse near Waltham Abbey.

After several visits, the deal was completed in July this year and the tapes, now in cardboard boxes rather than tea chests, are residing in a new storage area, much to its owner's amazement.

"I'm so glad I got the gig. I've known of the existence of the tapes for the last 40 years, but I never really dreamed they would become available, let alone that I'd



**“I feel this project is what my whole life has been leading to. Without meaning to sound big-headed, I’m the man for it.”**

ALAN WILSON



From left: Alan Wilson, Cliff Cooper and Iain McNay

be working on them. My biggest fear was always that they would deteriorate over the time and when they finally did surface they’d be no good. But Cliff Cooper has done a wonderful job looking after these tapes. In my opinion, he is the hero of the piece. He went to a lot of trouble and expense building a storage area that was perfect. Had it not been for Cliff, salvaging the tapes in the first place back in 1967 and then looking after them so well, this would have been a very different story.

“I genuinely feel this project is what my whole life has been leading to,” reveals Wilson. “I feel lucky to get the job but I also feel, without meaning to sound too big headed, I’m the best man for it. After I got the call, it took several days to sink in. The biggest frustration was I couldn’t tell anyone because it was under NDA. I’m in the Joe Meek Society and I’ve got lots of close friends that I go back decades with that I knew would be so excited but couldn’t tell. I don’t think I really believed it until I saw the tapes forklifted off the truck.”

The hard slog has already started for Wilson, who needs to work on 100 tapes

a month to meet his 18-month schedule. It’s a lot of graft and the process of converting the tapes to digital files is far from straightforward,

especially as they have been sitting in a warehouse for over 50 years.

#### THE GREAT BAKE-OFF

Wilson carefully explains the delicate process ahead of him: “Analogue tape is an unstable format. It’s made up of just three components; a strip of plastic, a strip of glue, and a strip of oxide dust, which contains the music. Over the years, the glue that holds the music to the plastic starts to absorb moisture from the air and will gradually become unset. If you try to play a tape, because the glue’s not set properly, the oxide will fall off and you’re left with a strip of plastic, no music.” Which, clearly, isn’t ideal. All of which means Wilson needs to draw the moisture back out of the glue through a process called baking, which involves him placing the tapes in a kiln and warming them under a low heat until the glue is reset. Then, after doing his best to recreate the original tape head settings, it’s finally time to put them on a tape machine and transfer to

digital. This will then enable Wilson to work on the tracks without punishing the tape, which can be put away back in its box.

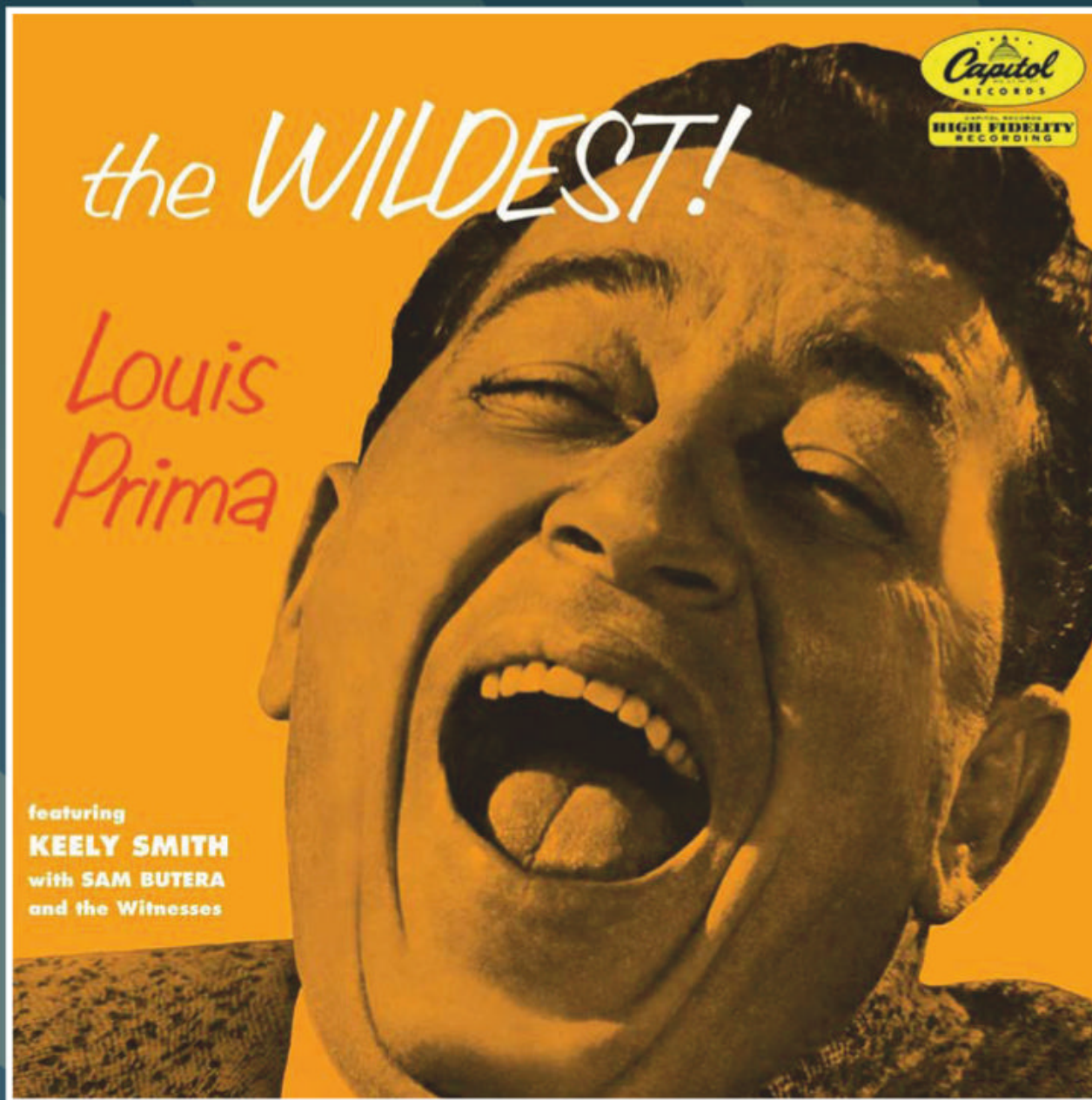
But that’s far from the end of Wilson’s involvement, as he also needs to be able to catalogue all the digital files he’s creating. Identifying all the artists isn’t going to be easy; not all the tape boxes are marked correctly, and some aren’t labelled at all.

Wilson remains confident: “We have a massive detective job to do. I took the liberty of seconding two really knowledgeable people from the Joe Meek Society onto the team, Pete Rochford and Rob Bradford, and we’re going to meet once a quarter to identify the artists on the tapes. It is a jigsaw puzzle, but once you start putting the pieces in place it usually starts to come together.”

One thing’s for certain: it won’t be for a lack of trying on Wilson’s part, a man who is so wrapped up in the Joe Meek legend that he’s considering obtaining a spooky souvenir from beyond the grave. “I box at a club with a load of coppers in Glastonbury and I asked one of them if it was possible to get fingerprints from a 52-year-old tape. He said, ‘yeah, no problem’. I know it sounds a bit perverse, but I’m tempted. I’d love to lift one of Joe Meek’s fingerprints off one of the tapes and keep it in a frame at home. I’m kind of joking... but I probably will do it.” ★







# Classic album

WORDS BY JACK WATKINS

.....  
**LOUIS PRIMA**  
**THE WILDEST!**  
.....





King of the swingers: Louis gets into the groove with wife and musical partner Keely Smith

## Dubbed the Italian Satchmo for his supreme jazz trumpet playing, Louis Prima relaunched himself in the 50s. *The Wildest!* captured the unique sound of a reborn artist at his dynamic peak.

**I**t's sometimes forgotten, amid all the hype about rock'n'roll and talk of kids doing it for themselves, that jazz was once young people's music, too.

The best of it swung like crazy and even if some of the extended soloing sometimes smacked of self-indulgence, the most exciting exponents could drive the listener into a state of ecstasy.

The Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Woody Herman and Lionel Hampton orchestras are great examples of bands who were rocking well before the marketing folk got hold of the term. But Louis Prima brought the thrill of swing into the big beat era, complete with a nonsensical jivespeak that was all his own. How appropriate that the song which endeared him to a later generation, *I Wanna Be Like You*, from 1967 movie *The Jungle Book*, kicked off with the line, "Now, I'm the king of the swingers, the jungle V.I.P."

Prima was a trumpet-playing jazzman steeped in the tradition of Louis Armstrong.

He'd formed his first band in the early 1930s and these days he has an exalted status among broader-minded fans of 50s music thanks to a series of records he made from the middle of that decade with wife and singing partner Keely Smith, saxophonist Sam Butera and the Witnesses. As a small combo, they built a huge reputation as a live attraction in the lounges of Las Vegas. The likes of the Stargazers, the Jive Aces and Brian Setzer are among the revivalists who have dipped into Prima's back catalogue to great effect, while his son Louis Prima Jr. has kept a candle burning for the high-energy, crowd-pleasing nature of his father's live shows in the States.

**LOUIS PRIMA  
BROUGHT  
THE THRILL OF  
SWING INTO THE  
BIG BEAT ERA**

Yet perhaps the closest we can get to the wonder of the combo in its pomp is listening to the first Prima album for Capitol Records, *The Wildest!* which was recorded over two days in April 1956. So superbly did it evoke their sound, when Capitol producer Voyle Gilmore played the session tapes back, the irrepressible Prima exclaimed: "That's us, man, that's us!"

Prima was already in his mid-40s by 1956, and he'd always been a bit different. Of Sicilian descent, he was born in 1910 in the Italian area of the New Orleans French Quarter, where black and white musicians mingled freely. Just as Louis Armstrong watched the Italian marching bands, Prima soaked up the behind-the-beat blowing of black jazz players.

Learning to play trumpet like his hero Armstrong, the distinguished dance band leader of the day Guy Lombardo had encouraged him to try his luck in New York in 1934. Rejected by the first club Lombardo recommended him to because the owner



# LOUIS PRIMA THE WILDEST!

1956 • CAPITOL

## Side 1

Medley: Just A Gigolo/I Ain't Got Nobody  
(And Nobody Cares For Me)  
(Nothing's Too Good) For My Baby  
The Lip  
Body And Soul  
Oh Marie

## Side 2

Medley: Basin Street Blues/When It's Sleepy Time  
Down South  
Jump, Jive, An' Wail  
Buona Sera  
Night Train  
(I'll Be Glad When You're Dead) You Rascal You

VOYLE GILMORE PRODUCER LOUIS PRIMA VOCALS, TRUMPET  
KEELY SMITH VOCALS SAM BUTERA TENOR SAXOPHONE JACK MARSHALL GUITAR  
JAMES "LITTLE RED" BLOUNT JR TROMBONE WILLIE McCUMBER PIANO  
AMATO RODRIGUES BASS GUITAR BOBBY MORRIS DRUMS



decided that, with his dark skin, tightly curled hair and rasping vocal style, he must be either an African American or a Creole, he eventually made his mark on 52nd Street's Famous Door club. Before long, Louis Prima and his New Orleans Gang were the hottest musical ticket in town.

For all the charismatic energy of his 50s performances, surviving clips show a middle-aged man, but in the 1930s Prima cut a lithe, agile figure on stage. *Variety* noted how huge numbers of teenagers, especially screaming and fainting females, were turning up just to see and hear Prima.



Louis Prima blows his own trumpet in Los Angeles, circa 1958

As Gary Boulard writes in his biography of the artist: "When he danced and coiled his way across the bandstand, he presented to his New York audiences a spectacle usually confined to the more suggestive black performances of Harlem." One of his sidemen later remarked: "Tom Jones and Elvis Presley weren't the first ones who turned the girls on by dancing funny. Louis did it all the time."

Prima wrote the swing-era classic *Sing, Sing, Sing*, later immortalised by the Benny Goodman Orchestra, with its thundering drummer Gene Krupa, at the celebrated Carnegie Hall concert in New York, in 1938. But by the early 50s, the swing era had passed and when Prima showed up at the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas with Smith, he was in a deep career slump, "so broke he actually had holes in his pants," according to the hotel owner Stan Irwin. His shrunken status was reflected painfully by the fact that he couldn't even get a show in the main nightclub area of the Sahara. Instead, he and Smith were offered a two-week trial in the graveyard slot at midnight in its tiny 20ft-wide Casbar Lounge, which opened out onto the gambling floor, meaning they had to compete with the calls of croupiers and the ring of slot machines.

But Prima wasn't settling for being a washed-up musical anachronism. Sensationally rejigging his act, before long gamblers were leaving the gaming tables and making Prima and Smith the primary focus of their attention. *The Wildest!* offers us an insight into how he did it, adapting his sound to the changing demands of the time, without entirely betraying his jazz origins. The album reflects Prima's ability to keep his ear to the ground. Throughout his career, he'd never lost sight of the popular audience; he'd indulged in the brassier novelty tunes of the late 1940s and early 50s, and now he was picking up on the hard-driving stylings of R&B and rock'n'roll. And so he hatched the idea of harnessing the latter's tougher beats with aspects of Dixieland jazz and swing.

Yet Louis Prima didn't do it alone. The arrangements on *The Wildest!*, full of abrupt tempo shifts, smart harmonising, and call-and-response patterns between vocals and instruments, are also testimony to the genius of Butera, a saxophonist who had played in the band of Prima's brother, Leon, back in New Orleans. Prima had called up Butera, 17 years his junior and also of Italian stock, after he'd landed the Las Vegas gig to bring the act some of the drive and bounce he'd heard in the work of swinging, jump





Jazz hands: Louis Prima's 1950s performances were charismatic and brimming with energy

## THE ARRANGEMENTS ON THE WILDEST! ARE TESTIMONY TO THE GENIUS OF SAM BUTERA

blues vocal groups such as The Treniers. "Let's do a shuffle" was the only instruction Prima gave him.

Butera was a skilful jazzier, capable of dashing off a solo in the style of tenor sax giant Coleman Hawkins, but he was equally adept at the big, booting sax sound that had become popular in the early 50s. Butera also brought with him some like-minded musicians for extra backing and, as Prima said to them, "You guys are all witnesses to what is happening here," they were thusly named the Witnesses.

Butera's arranging skills are immediately evident on what was, according to the sleeve notes, the first track cut during the recording sessions in the spring of 1956. ➡

## THE PERFECT FOIL PRIMA'S POKER-FACED PARTNER

Dark skinned and slender, born to Irish and Cherokee parents, Keely Smith fascinated Las Vegas audiences. Poker-faced, or with what arranger Nelson Riddle called "this deadpan look," she'd stand motionless while Louis Prima horsed around. Smith was effectively playing the comic foil to a clown and the chemistry between the middle-aged man and a woman 18 years his junior was irresistible. The act, fast-paced and noisy, was laced with innuendo, and "not for the kiddies" as *Downbeat* neatly put it. Prima and Smith brought rock'n'roll to the parents of teenagers, but, possessing a beautifully clear voice, Smith was essentially a jazz singer. One of the finest examples of her work with Prima is on their revival of the old standard *That Old Black Magic*, a Top 20 Stateside hit for them in 1958. Sadly, while it was climbing the charts, Prima and Smith's marriage was falling apart. But Smith also recorded separately from Prima, even releasing an R&B album, *Twist With Keely Smith* (1961) and an LP of Beatles songs, *Keely Smith Sings The John Lennon – Paul McCartney Songbook*, in 1964.





While *Just A Gigolo*, which was paired with *I Ain't Got Nobody (And Nobody Cares For Me)* to form a medley, was a near five-minute Prima masterclass, its seeming spontaneity was the work of hard rehearsal, both Prima and Butera being absolute perfectionists. Prima's singing is wistful and soulful in the first section of the song, the lyric delivered over what would become a patented shuffle beat. But the tempo builds as it moves into *I Ain't Got Nobody* and there are explosive contributions from Prima's trumpet, Butera's sax and the trombone of Jimmy "Little Red" Blount. Smith's voice is distinctive within the backing vocals, while Prima builds to a truly sensational, hyperventilating climax.

The next two tracks, (*Nothing's Too Good*) *For My Baby* and *The Lip* are duets between Prima and Smith. On the latter, at times sounding like Ella Mae Morse, Smith shows she could match Prima in the scat and jive talk department to humorous effect. Essentially, Smith was a stylish jazz singer who offered a fascinating contrast to Prima. While he played the amorous older guy, she stood cool and emotionless under her pageboy haircut.

*Body And Soul*, as if replicating the moment Prima paused for breath in the live show, offers an opportunity for Blount's trombone playing. The track starts slowly before progressing to a swinging beat and then slowing down again. This sets the listener up nicely for the blast of energy that is *Oh Marie*, probably Prima's best-



Prima's partner Keely Smith became his perfect foil

remembered number today among big beat fans. Prima had adapted the song, originally recorded in semi-operatic style by Italian baritone Antonio Scotti at the turn of the 20th Century, and which was already a standard among Italian crooners. Prima cut a more overblown version in singalong style, with typically anodyne Mitch Miller-style backing vocals, during an earlier stint at Columbia Records, but *The Wildest!* has the definitive version. The shuffle beat is upped a gear, with a strong syncopated effect created by the rhythm section, including a piano. There's a call-and-response exchange between Prima's vocal and Butera's sax, and after the singer breaks into Italian, he

teasingly mocks his friend: "What's the matter, Sam? You can't play in Italian?"

*Basin Street Blues/When It's Sleepy Time Down South* was another classic exercise in Prima and Butera hooking up two old-school jazz standards to a more contemporary backbeat. A burst of typical Prima jibberish segues into the faster second part of the medley, where Smith and the Witnesses deliver a doo-waahing backdrop. For all his fooling, Prima's singing is deeply affecting as he moves into a wailing climax over Butera's sax. *Jump, Jive, An' Wail* is one of Prima's most beloved signature numbers, while probably owing something to Louis Jordan. An infectious backbeat drives along the blowing of Butera, Blount and Prima, the track ending with a breathtaking call-and-response duel between the horns.

The beginning of the enchanting *Buona Sera* harks back to Prima's Italian heritage, before it bounds into another gorgeous shuffle, with more honking from Butera and Prima, the band shouting encouragement and clapping in the background. Pianist Willie McCumber gets a chance to shine on this one, and Smith's voice is attractively evident in the backing vocals.

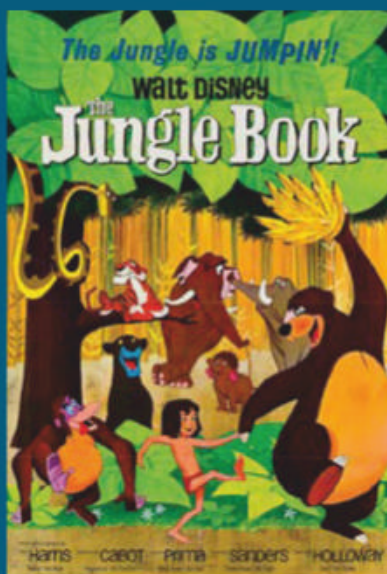
*Night Train* is a slow blues, but the album finishes on a speedy note with the humour of (*I'll Be Glad When You're Dead*) *You Rascal You*. Fittingly, the trumpet quotes some of Louis Armstrong's phrasing, while finishing with a typically Prima-esque blast. "Capitol has tried... to recreate as closely as possible what really happens 'at three o'clock in the morning at the Sahara,'" explains the LP sleeve. Taking that statement on trust, you can only wish you'd been there. ★

## KING OF THE JUNGLE

### HOW LOUIS LIT UP A DISNEY CLASSIC

On the face of it, Louis Prima cut a dated figure by the mid-60s. His putting-on-a-show style of razzmatazz and glamour was looking a bit old hat. Yet he was also a crazy, jiving dude. So when it was decided to give the apes in a new Walt Disney cartoon adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* a Dixieland jazz vibe, who better to turn to than Prima? Songwriters Robert and Richard Sherman visited Prima and his band in Las Vegas. As the brothers began humming *I Wanna Be Like You*, complete with "oo-oo-oohs", Prima exclaimed, "What d'ya wanna do – make a monkey out of me?" When they answered "Yes", he immediately replied, "Ya got me!"

Rare footage of Prima on YouTube performing the song during a studio session shows how the animators cleverly based the movements of King Louie of the Apes on Prima's stage mannerisms. They also show how Prima – with Butera behind him on sax – always committed himself fully to everything he did. Sheer genius.





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He came up with the Sunsets, but Shakin' Stevens' career really took off when he went solo



# "We were releasing singles like bullets"

Shakin' Stevens talks us through his incredible career, from early days with the Sunsets to a decade-long run of hit singles, via a starring role as Elvis in the West End

WORDS BY DOUGLAS McPHERSON

**O**f all the artists who emerged from the rock'n'roll scene of the 1970s and found chart success in the early 80s, no-one picked up the ball and ran with it as far as Shakin' Stevens. From the moment he hit No.1 with *This Ole House* in 1981, the denim-clad singer was a regular fixture on *Top Of The Pops*. In fact, he was the first artist to make 50 appearances on the show, performing hit after hit, including *You Drive Me Crazy*, *Green Door*, *Oh Julie*, *It's Late* and *Merry Christmas Everyone*. By the end of the decade, he was the UK's most successful singles act of the 1980s, spending more weeks on the chart than any other artist – an amazing 435 in all.

"It was full-on," says the Welsh singer, who also topped the charts in Ireland, Australia, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Switzerland and Poland. "In those days, when you had success, they wanted the next single, the next album, the next single, the next album... In one year, I think I put out four singles. We were releasing them like bullets."

Shaky also rang up impressive album sales, with six original LPs and two hits collections going gold, platinum or double-platinum in the UK and Europe.

Born Michael Barratt on 4 March 1948, in the Cardiff suburb of Ely, Shaky's father worked in the building trade and was a former miner.

"I was from a family of 13 children. I was the baby," Shaky recalls. "I used to sing in junior school, in front of the class,

and went from there. It was all I wanted to do. I wasn't interested in anything else but singing and performing."

After growing up with the records of the 40s and 50s and the early-60s pop of The Beatles, he gravitated to rock'n'roll: "Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry and many, many more."

Among Shaky's childhood friends was one Steven Vanderwalker, from whom he



eventually took his stage name. "We used to play rounders in the street and this guy, Steve, used to hold the bat like a guitar and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen... Shakin' Stevens!' I thought, 'that's a wacky name'. My own name didn't ring as a singer, because there was a newscaster called Michael Barratt. So when I was looking for a name, I thought I'd use that."

Another pal was Shaky's next door neighbour David Dutson, who played rhythm guitar in his first band, the

Olympics, so called "because our drummer had an Olympic kit".

By day, Shaky and David started a window-cleaning round, and Shaky later shook, rattled and rolled a float full of bottles as a milkman. But his main focus remained the band, which evolved into the Denims. Gigs ranged from church halls to rugby clubs and events for the Young Communist League, although Shaky wasn't interested in the politics. Venturing further afield to London, "We played the famous 2i's coffee bar, where Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele used to play. We did very well for a time."

By 1969 Shaky was looking for a change, which came courtesy of new manager and fellow Welshman Paul 'Legs' Barrett.

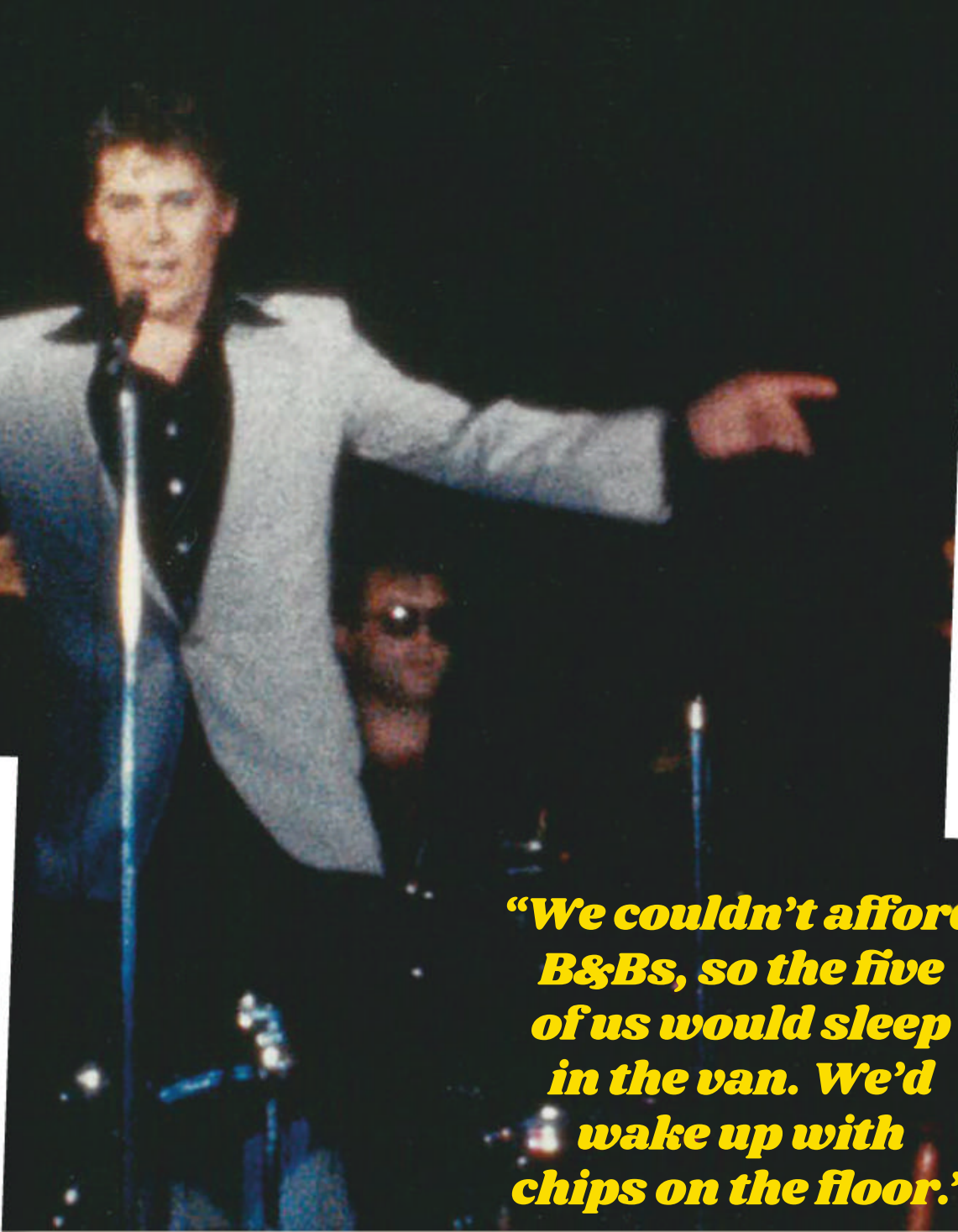
"I think somebody said to Paul, 'Why don't you go round and check out Shakin' Stevens?' So he came down to a gig. The band I was with was coming to an end, so I went with Paul. He had a band called the Backbeats. So some of the Backbeats' members joined myself and became Shakin' Stevens and the Sunsets."

The group played a mix of Chuck Berry and Johnny Burnette covers, and developed a wild stage act. "The bass player would sit on the piano player's shoulders and be bopping here and bopping there – we'd be all over the place. We had a brilliant sax player, who used to throw his instrument up in the air, then he'd catch it and carry on blowing!

"I'd think, 'he's only got to drop it and we've got no sax'. But in the time that



Shaky fronting the Sunsets, who landed a support slot for The Rolling Stones in 1969



***"We couldn't afford B&Bs, so the five of us would sleep in the van. We'd wake up with chips on the floor."***



All shook up: Shaky playing Elvis in 1978

he was with me, he never dropped it once."

After John Lennon's appearance at the Toronto Rock'n'Roll Revival

concert, Legs wrote a tongue-in-cheek letter in the music press inviting the ex-Beatle to audition for the Sunsets. Lennon didn't respond, but the publicity stunt resulted in the Sunsets being invited to open for The Rolling Stones at London's Saville Theatre.

"As we walked in, the Stones were on stage rehearsing, and I heard Mick Jagger singing 'Bopping at the high school hop...', Jerry Lee Lewis' *High School Confidential*. I thought, 'Wow!' It was a fantastic gig, a great thrill and I enjoyed it immensely."

In 1973, Shaky shared the bill with Screaming Lord Sutch, Crazy Cavan 'n' the Rhythm Rockers, and a host of other homegrown acts at 'The First Ever All British Rock'n'roll Revival Festival' at Alexandra Palace. The landmark event

was an indication of the scale of Britain's growing rock'n'roll revival, which Shaky was at the heart of.

When Stuart Colman launched the BBC's dedicated rock'n'roll radio programme, *It's Rock'n'roll*, in 1976, Shaky sang the opening jingle: "We ain't got pop, we ain't got soul, what we got is ROCK'N'ROLL!"

"They had guests come in and sing, and I was one of them, with the Sunsets," Shaky remembers. "They were good times, and learning times as well; doing your first recording on the radio."

Touring in those pre-hit days was far from glamorous. "We couldn't afford B&Bs, so the five of us would sleep in the van. We'd wake up with chips on the floor. Not a pretty sight! Then off to a public convenience to have a wash down and shave before the next gig. That went on for a while."

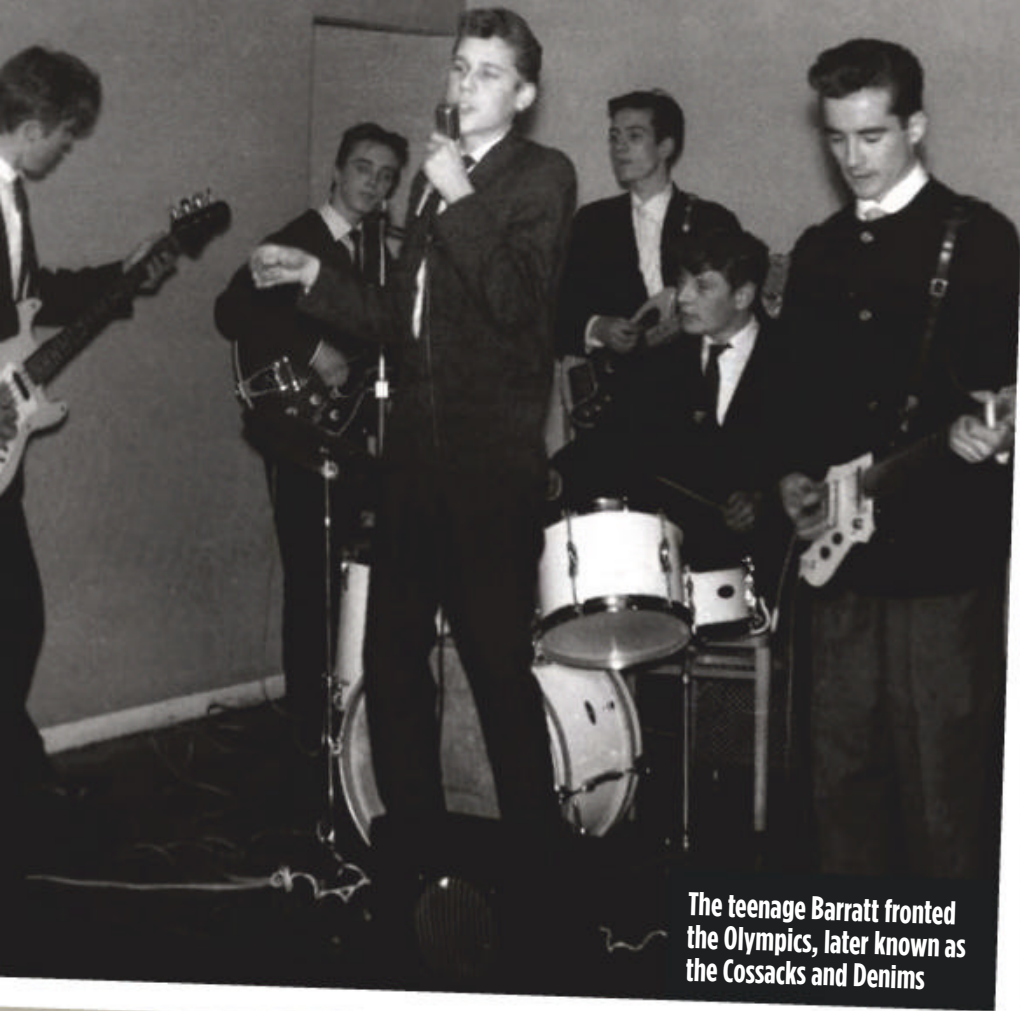
The Sunsets gained the attention of Radio 1 DJ John Peel, who briefly signed them to his own record label, Dandelion – without releasing anything – and fellow Welsh rocker Dave Edmunds (fresh from the success of the guitar instrumental *Sabre Dance* with his band Love Sculpture). Edmunds introduced them to Parlophone and produced their first album, *A Legend*, in 1970. Sales

were poor, however, and after five more little-heard albums with the band, Shaky signed his first solo deal with Track Records, former home of The Who and Jimi Hendrix, in early 1977. "We had some guys from Sounds Incorporated, really great musicians. It was very raunchy. Unfortunately, by the time they came to release the album (titled *Shakin' Stevens*), the company went into liquidation, so everything fell flat," he recalls.

Shaky's big break came later that year when he was chosen to play the movie-era Elvis Presley, alongside Tim Whitnall and PJ Proby, who portrayed the 1950s and 1970s versions, in Jack Good's West End musical, *Elvis*. "Jack had a later-career Elvis lined up, and an early-career person lined up. They didn't have a middle one, so one of the musicians in the show mentioned my name: 'Why don't you check Shaky out?'"

"Jack attended to my gig at the Greyhound. At the end of the show, he came over and asked me to audition for the part. I auditioned, but was very nervous. Keith Strachan, the musical director, was there. I sang two songs with the piano, and he said, 'As far as I'm concerned, I'd say yes'. Jack Good came in and had a listen, and he said, 'My boy, you have the part!'"





The teenage Barratt fronted the Olympics, later known as the Cossacks and Denims



Shaky's take on *This Ole House* followed the Rosemary Clooney version to No.1

Opening at the Astoria Theatre just three months after Presley's demise, *Elvis* was a huge hit. It won the Evening Standard Theatre Award for Best Musical and ran for 614 performances, into 1979, playing to 8,000 people a week. "It was the show to go to," as Shaky puts it.

Good, who had pioneered Britain's television coverage of rock'n'roll with *Oh Boy!* in 1958, capitalised on the burgeoning rock'n'roll revival with a new version of the show in 1979, and followed it with the similar *Let's Rock*. Both shows starred Shaky alongside Alvin Stardust, Lulu, Joe Brown and Freddie 'Fingers' Lee in a non-stop stream of brightly costumed song-and-dance numbers.

"Jack was responsible for *Oh Boy!* in the beginning, with Marty Wilde and Cliff Richard, so it was a thrill to be with a man who knew his stuff," Shaky recalls. "The musical lifted my name, and so did *Let's Rock*, because it was on once a week."

The exposure paved the way for Shaky to sign a new record deal with Epic, and make his first trip up the charts with *Hot Dog*. The original version by country singer Buck Owens, performing as Corky Jones, failed to chart in 1957, but Shaky's revival reached No.24 in the UK and led to a spirited prime-time debut on *Top Of The Pops* that saw him dancing on top of Geraint Watkins' piano.

"After that, I had *Hey Mae*, which had radio plays on Capital, but didn't dent the chart. Then the one that really kicked it off for me was *Marie, Marie*. I heard the original by The Blasters when I was on a promotional tour somewhere. Somebody played it to me, and that was it. Sometimes you hear a song and think: ➡



## There Will Be Blood

### Career retrospective boxset runs to 19 discs

Forty years after he first made it into the charts with *Hot Dog*, Shakin' Stevens has released a mammoth career-spanning boxset, *Fire In The Blood*, on 27 November, comprising 226 tracks across 19 CDs.

"There's a lot there," says Shaky, who has been compiling the lavish retrospective since the end of 2019. Extras include *Oh Julie*'s sheet music and a tour programme. "The artwork is excellent and we're very pleased with it. With Christmas coming, it's a fine package."

Beginning with his eponymous first solo release from 1978, the collection includes all of Shaky's albums in their entirety, up to his most recent, the critically-acclaimed *Echoes Of Our Times*, released in 2016. In addition to the hits, there are four discs of B-sides, radio mixes, 12" mixes

and rarities, such as a session for Paul Jones' radio show, and a couple of unreleased tracks, including new single *Wild At Heart*.

With Shaky having never before released a live album, highlights include not one but two discs of concert recordings. One is a snapshot of his most recent European tour, in 2019, while the other is a scorching performance recorded for Radio 1's In Concert series at the moment he burst onto the charts with *Hot Dog* and *Marie, Marie* in 1980.

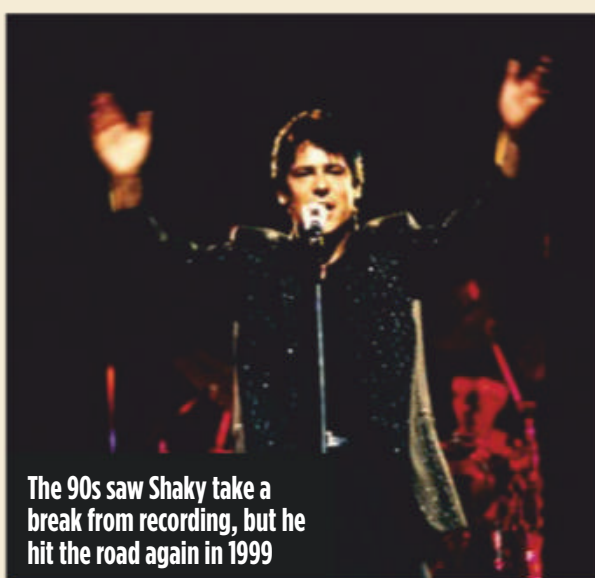
For those who just want the hits, Shaky is also releasing *Singled Out*, a 3CD collection of all his solo singles, from pre-hit releases such as *Justine* to smashes like *This Ole House* and *Lipstick Powder And Paint*. There's also a 2LP version featuring Shaky's personal favourites, curated by the man himself.





After suffering a heart attack in 2010, Shaky returned to touring action again in 2011

***“I did Top Of The Pops... I didn't know what to wear, so I put these denims on. It became a trademark.”***



The 90s saw Shaky take a break from recording, but he hit the road again in 1999

‘I like this, there’s something about it. It’s got the hook. It’s got a story in there as well’. I just wanted to record it. We were in the studio in the next couple of days. We recorded it and couldn’t wait to get it out.”

*Marie, Marie* gave Shaky his first Top 20 hit, reaching No.19 in the UK and the same position in Germany. “That opened it up for me in Europe and other territories,” the singer recalls.

The single’s parent album was also called *Marie, Marie*, but not for long.

The title was hastily changed to *This Ole House* to reflect the phenomenal success of Shaky’s next single, which catapulted him to No.1. *This Ole House* pre-dated rock’n’roll – Rosemary Clooney topped the charts with it on both sides of the Atlantic in 1954. Shaky took his inspiration from a sparse rockabilly update by NRBQ in 1979, but made the song utterly his own, aided by slick production by Stuart Colman that combined 50s-style rockabilly guitar licks with a glossy 80s-pop drum track. Shaky made his first video to promote the song, with the help of some enthusiastic extras.

“We shot it at an old farmhouse with the windows missing, and because it was on farmland we asked the farmers, ‘Do you want to be in the video?’ So there they are on the chorus in their farm clothes!” Shaky chuckles.

The song also introduced Shaky’s most famous outfit, consisting of denim jacket, jeans and white shoes, although not by any grand design. “I had a No.1 record, so I did *Top Of The Pops*. But I had no dressers or people saying you should

wear this or wear that. I didn’t know what to wear, really. So I thought I’d put these denims on. I often wore white shoes. It became a trademark for me.”

The singer’s equally distinctive footwork was similarly achieved without the aid of a choreographer. “It was just natural stuff, really,” he shrugs.

The follow-up single, the laid-back *You Drive Me Crazy*, was a new song by Ronnie Harwood that reached No.2 in the UK, No.1 in Australia, Denmark and Ireland, and charted highly all over Europe. But Shaky was soon back in the top slot with another pre-rock’n’roll pop song – Frankie Vaughan’s 50s hit *Green Door* – which he gave a *This Ole House*-style makeover. “We were in Eden Studios in Chiswick, and the guys went down the road to get a bite to eat and a beer,” he remembers. “Nick Lowe was in the pub. He said, ‘Give Shaky my congratulations on the success of *You Drive Me Crazy*, and you know what? I think his next single should be *Green Door*’.

“It was quite a surprising thing to say, because none of us could see it. When





## Deep and crisp and Stevens

**The story behind a Christmas hit that keeps on giving**

Christmas hits can have a special longevity and Shaky's 1985 chart-topper *Merry Christmas Everyone* is perhaps his most enduring release. Having given the singer his fourth and, to date, last No.1 single in 1985, the song has become a yuletide mainstay. Thanks to downloads, it has returned to the UK chart every year since 2007, hitting a peak of No.6 last year.

The crisp and catchy single was written by Bob Heatlie, who penned Shaky's 1983 hit *Cry Just A Little Bit*, as well as Aneka's 1981 chart-topper *Japanese Boy*. It was produced by Dave Edmunds, who had helmed the first album by Shakin' Stevens and the Sunsets, in 1970.

The song was recorded for release in 1984, but the plan changed to avoid it being overshadowed by Band Aid's fundraiser, *Do They Know It's Christmas?*

"Not blowing my own trumpet, but *Merry Christmas Everyone* came across to me as a No.1 record," says Shaky. "It would have been foolish to release it at the same time as Band Aid, because then I would have been No.2 or No.3 or whatever. So we held it back to the following year. Band Aid went to No.1 in 1984. Then the next year, I went to No.1 and Band Aid went to No.2."

To mark the 30th anniversary of the initial release of *Merry Christmas Everyone*, in 2015, Shaky recorded a bluegrass-flavoured remake called *Echoes Of Merry Christmas Everyone*, with proceeds going to the Salvation Army.

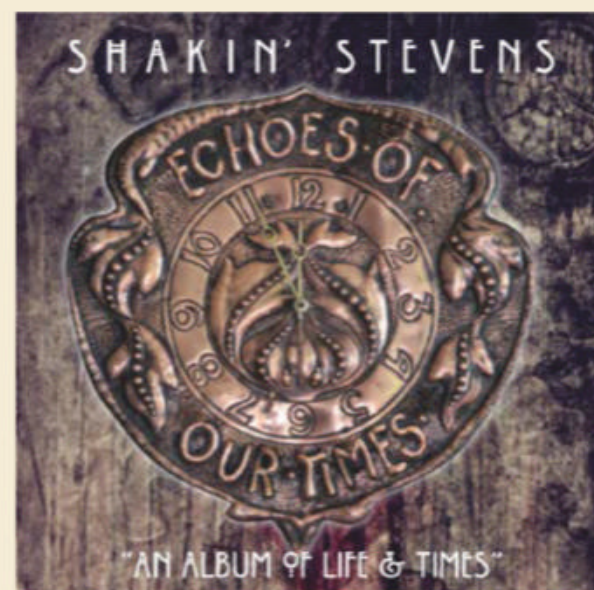


they came back and told me, I went, 'Green Door...?'. We carried on with what we were recording, then at the end of the day we said, 'Hey, let's try it'. So we did. It went into the chart at No.22 and then straight to No.1."

As well as reinventing oldies, Shaky wrote a number of original songs for his albums. His craft came to the fore on his next chart-topper, *Oh Julie*, which was powered by the Cajun accordion of regular sideman Geraint Watkins.

"I was really knocked out when it went to No.1," says Shaky. "I think people could relate to the squeezebox, especially throughout Europe. It had a good Cajun feel and people really pricked their ears up. There have been a tremendous amount of covers of it."

Shaky's total of 33 hits include *A Love Worth Waiting For* (No.2), *What Do You Want To Make Those Eyes At Me For* (No.5), the self-penned *Teardrops* (No.5) and his duet with Bonnie Tyler, *A Rockin' Good Way* (No.5). Perhaps one of the reasons Shaky was able to sustain a Top 40 career into the early 90s was his ability



to blend an element of 50s nostalgia with a smooth contemporary pop sound. One prime example was his 1983 hit *Cry Just A Little Bit*, with its prominent drum machine, Shaky's only song to make a dent on the US chart. "The DJs were saying, 'this is a real change for Shaky' and thinking back, I guess it was," he reflects. "But it went to No.3 in the UK, and throughout Europe and Poland they really lapped it up."

Another factor in Shaky's longevity is the cross-generational appeal of his catchy, feel-good material. "When I first started, I think the parents were the fans and when I was on TV, they used to watch with their children. Then as time went on, their children became fans as well. I remember a man coming backstage in Scotland. He said, 'I used to watch you with my parents when I was growing up, and here I am seeing you at 47'. I think that's how the audience has evolved. Today, it's 24 to 54 and upwards. It's a good range."

In 2005, Shaky returned to the Top 20 with his cover of Pink's *Trouble*, off the back of his appearance alongside other 80s pop stars on the TV show, *Hit Me Baby One More Time*. More recently, he enjoyed critical acclaim with *Echoes Of Our Times*, an uncharacteristically dark Americana-style album of self-penned songs about his family tree. The 2016 release made No.22 on the UK album chart and a follow-up is in production, but has been paused by this year's lockdown, as has his touring schedule.

The now 72-year-old singer has not been idle, however, and has spent his enforced time off from the road compiling an impressive 19CD career-spanning boxset, *Fire In The Blood* (see panel). Released in time for Christmas, it's a fitting tribute to one of the most successful careers in rock'n'roll history. ★

***Fire In The Blood* and *Singled Out* is out now on BMG and reviewed on page 89.**



# SIX STRINGS OF FIRE

## TOP 10 21st Century Guitarists

**From Scotty Moore and Eddie Cochran to Mark Harman and Brian Setzer, the electric guitarist has defined the sound of rockabilly and roots music. Here are 10 of the hottest players in today's scene.**

WORDS BY DAVID WEST



### 10 Dan Edwards – The Rayford Brothers

“For me, it’s combining styles. Country and blues mainly, R&B with a little Southern twang is roots to me,” says Dan Edwards, aka Link Rayford, who took his band’s name from an episode of classic sci-fi show *The Twilight Zone*. Armed with his “home-built No-caster” guitar, Edwards has played with Gene Vincent’s Blue Caps, rocked with Slim Jim Phantom, jammed with Lemmy and gigged with neo-rockabilly kingpin Robert Gordon at California’s Hootenanny festival in the 90s.

“I think it was the second one, Chuck Berry was also on the bill,” says Edwards. “Robert was pretty easy to work with, he sent me the material from New York ahead of time. A few of the tunes were just Robert with a drum machine and guitar, not meant for people to hear, but it’s what he had available.” Soon after, Edwards met Gordon’s old musical partner – and the source of his stage name – Link Wray. “I was thrilled,” he says. “Link was like a fictional character to me. I remember feeling starstruck for quite a while after, his guitar playing had tonnes of attitude.”

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *I’m The Wolfman, Bring It On Home*  
**VISIT** [therayfordbros.com](http://therayfordbros.com)



### 9 Ashley Kingman – Big Sandy & His Flyrite Boys

“People have always said to me, ‘You can make the hairs on the back of my neck stand up,’” explains London-born Ashley Kingman. The guitarist had a similar reaction the first time he heard Big Sandy & His Flyrite Boys before he joined their ranks. “I’d never seen anything that good, everything was off the charts,” he says. “I thought it was a little bit of a lost art.”

With his 50s Magnatone Mark V, built by the great Paul Bigsby, Kingman is a fixture in the house band at the Viva Las Vegas rockabilly festival, backing legends such as Janis Martin.

“The music has meant so much to me, it’s been nice to be part of making it grow,” he says. “People come up and say, ‘Man, you play your ass off!’ You feel a bit humbled. You think, ‘I must be doing something right’. Most of it comes off the top of my head. It’s all about how you say it, not so much what you say. Some people can say a thousand words and still not get their point across, and some people can say one word and tell you everything. Music’s the same.”

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *Yes (I Feel Sorry For You), Chalk It Up To The Blues*  
**VISIT** [bigsandy.net](http://bigsandy.net)





## 8 Bloodshot Bill

A wild tornado of energy, Bloodshot Bill was a self-described late bloomer on the guitar. "In high school, my friends and I thought it would be cool to start a band, but everyone wanted to play guitar," he says. "One of the guys finally got one and I asked him to show me some chords. After struggling for five minutes with that, I decided I'd play drums instead. Years later, I wanted to write my own songs and figured it was better to try that on guitar than with drums."

Link Wray and Scotty Moore are two heroes, "but I'm into most anyone with style," says Bill, "the more primitive sounding, the better! I've never been into guitarists that play a zillion notes, that just bores me. Gimme some zit-faced teenager strumming in E with the tremolo turned high and I'm in heaven."

Onstage, Bill can be found manhandling a battered and bruised Kay Galaxie, blasted through a small tube amp – the perfect combination for his raw sound. "It doesn't have a tone knob, so there's less thinking involved right there, which suits me just fine," says Bill about the Galaxie. "They really don't make stuff like they used to."

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *Know Myself, My Heart Cries For You*

**VISIT** [bloodshotbill.com](http://bloodshotbill.com)



## 7 Deke Dickerson

"I saw Chuck Berry on TV when I was really young, doing the duck walk, and said, 'This is what I want to do!'" declares the St Louis-born Deke Dickerson. As a youngster, Dickerson taught himself to play after one lesson, "from a hippie at a local music store. He told my dad that if I didn't stop listening to Buddy Holly, I'd never be a great guitar player. I quit taking lessons immediately."

With his custom Hallmark Deke Dickerson guitar, he's recorded at Sun Studio with J.M. Van Eaton, and cut film soundtracks for Johnny Knoxville. "Less is more," says Dickerson about his style. "You can always tell somebody who doesn't 'get' our music because they play too much. Rockabilly, hillbilly, doo-wop, surf, our music is simple and fun. You start doing too much 'virtuoso' stuff, it's just not correct."

For 10 years, Dickerson's Guitar Geek festival shone the spotlight on roots masters. "I wanted a guitar festival with cool guitarists, instead of the w\*\*kers that you always see at those things," he says. "I brought in my heroes to headline, like Duane Eddy, Nokie Edwards and Dick Dale, as well as showcasing lots of great obscure guitarists. It was a blast."

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *I Might Not Come Home At All, Wear Out The Soles Of My Shoes*

**VISIT** [dekedickerson.com](http://dekedickerson.com)

## 6 JD McPherson

"Sounds and attitude are more fascinating to me than the correct application of the Lydian mode with 32nd notes," says JD McPherson, whose guitar heroes include Chuck Berry, Wilko Johnson, Bo Diddley and Link Wray. "I enjoy technical players, too, but I'll never be able to be one of those. My pinky doesn't work well enough."

JD's instrument of choice is a TK Smith custom build. "It's such a cool guitar that it fools people into thinking I can actually play it!" He must be doing something right, having toured with his fellow Oklahoman Wanda Jackson. McPherson picks his solo on *North Side Gal* as a sterling example of his work, "because it's a recording of me genuinely having fun," he says, "and maybe the solo to *Let The Good Times Roll*, because it's literally just a descending major scale. My good friend Joel Paterson, who actually is a genuine guitar hero, was on tour with us, and between sets, he kept humming the solo and saying, 'Why is that so catchy?' I was like, 'because it's just the major scale, Joel!' We laughed about that a lot. Sometimes the most simple thing is the answer. It usually is!"

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *North Side Gal, Let The Good Times Roll*

**VISIT** [jdmcpherson.com](http://jdmcpherson.com)







## 5 Darrel Higham

"You have to feel the music," says British guitarist and bandleader Darrel Higham, who brought rockabilly to the charts with Imelda May, and has performed with legends including Sonny Burgess, Billy Lee Riley and Royce Porter. He was inspired to start strumming after hearing Eddie Cochran, and taught himself to play after one unsuccessful guitar lesson at school. "The teacher showed us how to play *One Man Went To Mow* on one string and I thought, 'That looks far too difficult for me,' and I never went back."

Higham believes his job is to put the song first, like his idol Cochran. "I think he downplayed a lot of his playing skills because he realised it's dance music at the end of the day. People want to dance, sing along and have a good time," he says. "It's not really about being technically brilliant, it's the feel. That's everything. You can be as technical as you want, and there are some unbelievably technical rockabilly players out there, but I also love listening to players that just close their eyes and hit the guitar as hard as they can."

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *Right Amount Of Wrong, Wild Woman*  
**VISIT** [darrelhigham.com](http://darrelhigham.com)



## 3 Pat Capocci

Growing up in New South Wales, Australia, the first guitar player on Pat Capocci's radar was his father. He remembers "walking into our music room at the family home and seeing dad playing and singing, all the while trying not to show his frustration as I'd just interrupted the song at a good part."

Capocci's own playing is an attempt to "combine everything that I've learnt and been influenced by and restate it in my own, authentic, personal manner that's uniquely me." These influences include "Johnny 'Guitar' Watson for his wild timing, Charlie Christian for his melodic and structured selection of notes, Django Reinhardt for his speed and cheekiness, Magic Sam for his simple and straight-to-the-point note selection and Barney Kessel for his amazing intellect and song structures."

His main guitar is a Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster, but he's been known to wield a 1949 Gibson L-50, a Fender Telecaster and even a Flying V. "To be honest, I feel it all comes down to what's in the subconscious mind, and how your hands react to those memories; how and where you place them and how much or little pressure you use. When all of those things connect and are flowing freely, game on!"

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *Slave For The Beat, Hot Hot Heat*  
**VISIT** [patcapocci.com](http://patcapocci.com)

## 4 Austin John – The Hi-Jivers

"It's dirty, unpolished and real-sounding to me," says Austin John, the guitar-slinging engine behind Nashville R&B outfit The Hi-Jivers.

John started out listening to Jimi Hendrix and classic rock until he heard Stevie Ray Vaughan's *Texas Flood*. "From then on, blues music became my passion," says John, whose playing has the propulsive drive of his bluesmen idols, who never relied on a drumbeat to make a crowd dance.

Apparently, it's all in the fingers.

"Johnny 'Guitar' Watson

taught me so much

about attacking the strings as hard as you can. He used the flesh of his fingers on his right hand to really snap the notes," says John.

"Hollywood Fats has been a huge influence as well. His use of saturated reverb on his guitar playing is monumental. I've been obsessed with reverb tanks ever since I heard him use one!"

John's sound often comes from the blissful union of a Fender Strat through a '58 Deluxe. "It makes me think of Ike Turner playing guitar on Otis Rush's early recordings. That's *the* sound!" The guitarist is busy writing for the next Hi-Jivers album, and has just finished a blues LP of his own, which he calls "a labour of love record".

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *Something's Gotta Shake, Knee High & Risin'*  
**VISIT** [thehijivers.com](http://thehijivers.com)





## 2 Al Dual

“I don’t pretend to play like anyone else, I try to give each song a different stylistic treatment with the guitar,” explains Al Dual, whose first inspiration was the twanging tones of Hank Marvin. “I was only 11 when I first listened to him and I remember that I was in shock.”

Dual’s next revelation came when he heard jazz great Charlie Christian. “That day, I realised that all the references I had studied before had been born from Charlie’s guitar,” he says, “it was just at that precise moment when I focused my studies on that man from Oklahoma and started to look for a style with its own voice, like the pioneers did in the early 50s.”

Dual’s incredibly nimble hands on the fretboard are equally adept at rockabilly, country, surf and R&B, and his talents have attracted the attention of Gretsch, who built him a “curious and exclusive” Gretsch Panther TCB 6137 Prototype.

2018 saw the Spanish maestro inducted into the Rockabilly Hall of Fame and win an Ameripolitan Award. These days, he’s running his own label, Mr Panther Records, and remains dedicated to his life’s mission, to “play rock’n’roll with its own character”.

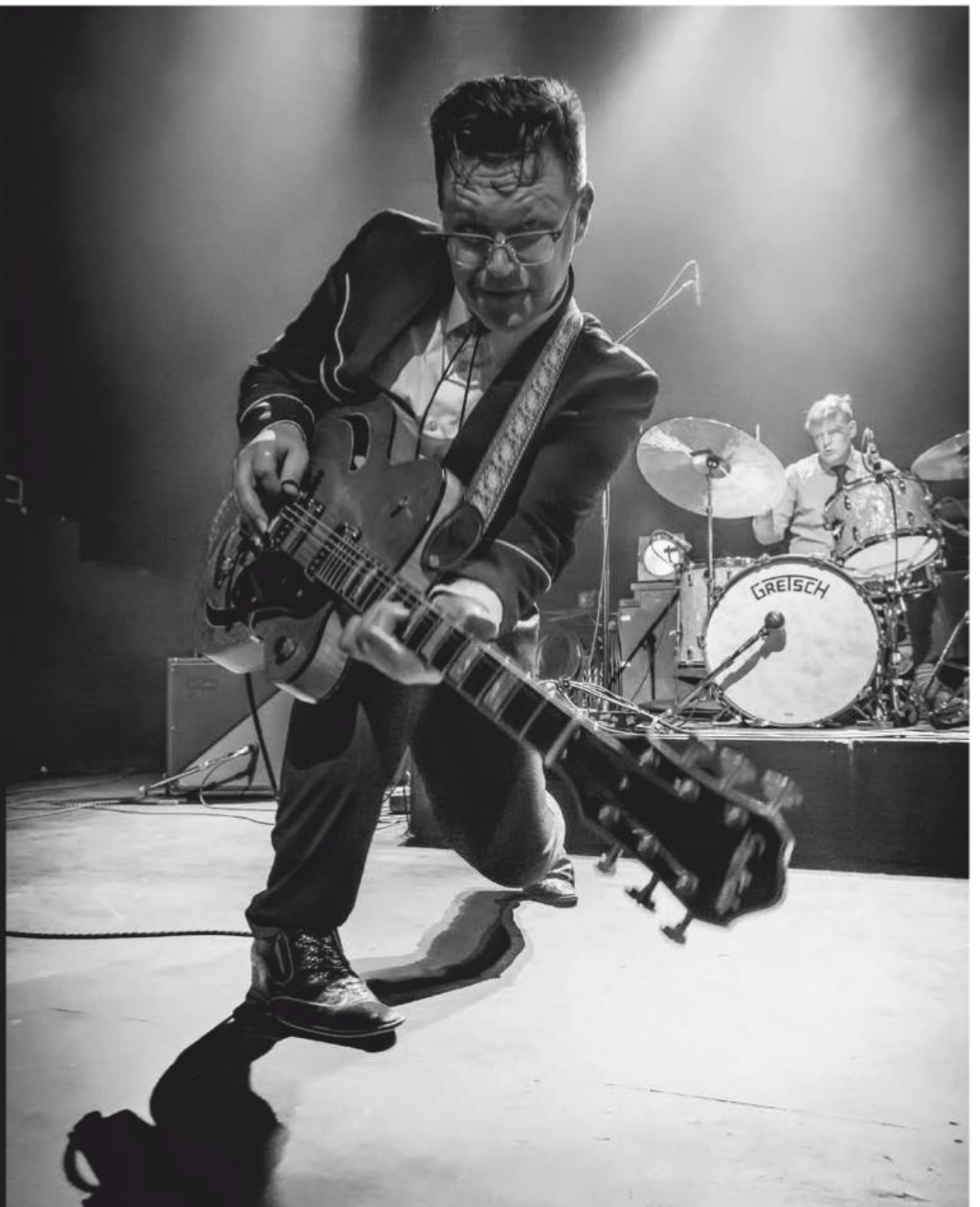
**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *What A Trip We Lived, Young Love*  
**VISIT** [aldual.com](http://aldual.com)

## 1 Paul Pigat – Cousin Harley

“I’m not exactly sure what was the first reason I picked up the guitar,” says Paul Pigat. “I was pretty solitary as a kid and it was something I could do alone. I thought it might help me meet people, but it just made me stay in my bedroom trying to figure it out.” Equally fluent in the jazz styles of Tal Farlow and Charlie Christian as the hot licks of Danny Gatton and Albert Lee, Pigat’s hunger for musical sustenance led him to a degree in Classical Theory And Composition. “My thinking was that if I was going to do this for a living – there certainly wasn’t anything else I was remotely interested in – then I better figure out how this all works.”

He’s thrown himself into understanding his instrument on every level, co-designing the Gretsch Synchro-Club with their master builder Stephen Stern, calling the model “a combination of all things I dig about Gretsch guitars with a little bit of quirkiness”. Opening for Brian Setzer on Christmas Eve in his Toronto hometown was a high-water mark. “But when it comes down to it, every night’s a highlight if the band is cooking and the crowd is jumpin’!”

**ESSENTIAL LISTENING** *Leave This Town, Deep South*  
**VISIT** [paulpigat.com](http://paulpigat.com)





# ROCKABILLY'S BIG DADDY

**60 years after Johnny Burnette scaled the charts with *Dreamin'*, his son Rocky Burnette and nephew Billy Burnette discuss the life, death and lasting influence of one of the architects of rockabilly**

WORDS BY DOUGLAS McPHERSON

**L**ike so many of the original rock'n'rollers, Johnny Burnette's career was cut short by tragedy. At the time of his death in a boating accident in the summer of 1964, the handsome singer was best known for the smooth and catchy, string-laden teen pop hits *Dreamin'* and *You're Sixteen*. However, the mark he left on music was far wider and deeper than that.

Before his success as a solo artist, Johnny and his brother Dorsey wrote a string of hits for Ricky Nelson, including *Waitin' In School*, *Believe What You Say* and *It's Late*.

And before that, the Burnette brothers teamed with guitarist Paul Burlison and created one of the most incendiary caches of

rockabilly music ever recorded, as Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n roll Trio. Drenched in echo, driven by Dorsey's slap bass, shot through with Burlison's lightning-bolt guitar licks and peppered with Johnny's wild yells and screams, songs such as *Tear It Up*, *The Train Kept A-Rollin'* and *Eager Beaver Baby* remain unsurpassed examples of the genre.

The only trouble was, the songs were too wild for mid-50s America and never scratched the charts. It was only 25 years later, when the Stray Cats spearheaded a rockabilly revival (and covered the Trio's *Your Baby Blue Eyes* almost note for note) that fans began to realise that the Burnettes were the ones who started the whole thing.

"My dad and Dorsey didn't clean up their lyrics the way Elvis did," says Johnny's son, Rocky. "They didn't say, 'I wanna play house with you'. They said, 'I wanna make love with you'. *Train Kept-A-Rolling* was about two people making it in the back of a train."

"They were banned just about everywhere," confirms Dorsey's son, Billy. "When I started doing that stuff again in 1980, everybody thought it was punk music."

## THE WILD ONES

Johnny Burnette was born in Memphis on 25 March 1934, a year and three months after Dorsey, who arrived on 28 December 1932. As infants, they were each given



Johnny Burnette's legacy and lasting influence on future rockabilly bands cannot be overstated



a guitar by their father one Christmas. According to legend, they responded by immediately smashing the instruments over each other's heads, and a fondness for violence never left the brothers, who grew up as keen on boxing as they were on music. In fact, it was at a boxing tournament that Dorsey met another pugilist, Paul Burlison, who joined them in their first band, a country and bluegrass outfit called Johnny Burnette and his Rhythm Rangers.

The group released an up-tempo country rendition of Dorsey's song, *You're Undecided* on the Von label as early as 1953, although different sources give later dates. Credited only to Johnny Burnette as artist, the single

is not to be confused with the Trio's later echo-drenched rockabilly version.

The Burnettes lived in Lauderdale Courts, a low-income federal housing project where the concrete walls of a laundry room provided the perfect echo for rehearsals. A frequent visitor to their sessions was Elvis Presley, who lived in the same development. And, according to the Burnettes, it was there, not at Sun Records, that rockabilly was born.

"In my book, *Crazy Like Me*, I have a picture of my dad and Elvis standing out front of Lauderdale Courts," says Billy. "It's the Boys Club and my dad is standing right next to Elvis in a group shot in, I think, '52 or

'53. My mom lived across the street and she used to play basketball with Elvis when they were teenagers. A lot of people dismiss the influence of the Burnettes on Elvis, but he got a lot of his ideas from those guys."

Jerry Naylor, who took over as the lead singer with the Crickets following Buddy Holly's death, claims that rockabilly was named after the Burnettes' sons Rocky and Billy, who were born in consecutive months in 1953.

According to Naylor's book *The Rockabilly Legends: They Called It Rockabilly Long Before They Called It Rock and Roll*, the brothers would dedicate a number to their sons and introduce it with "Here's

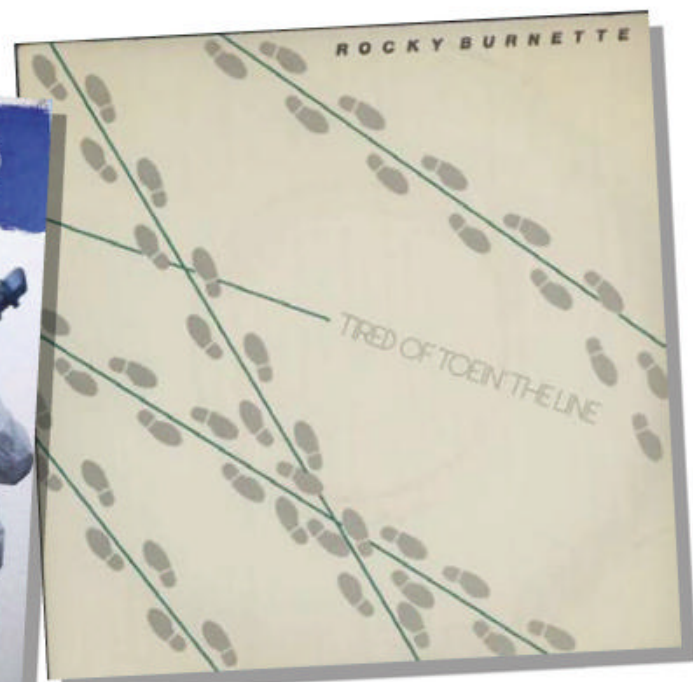
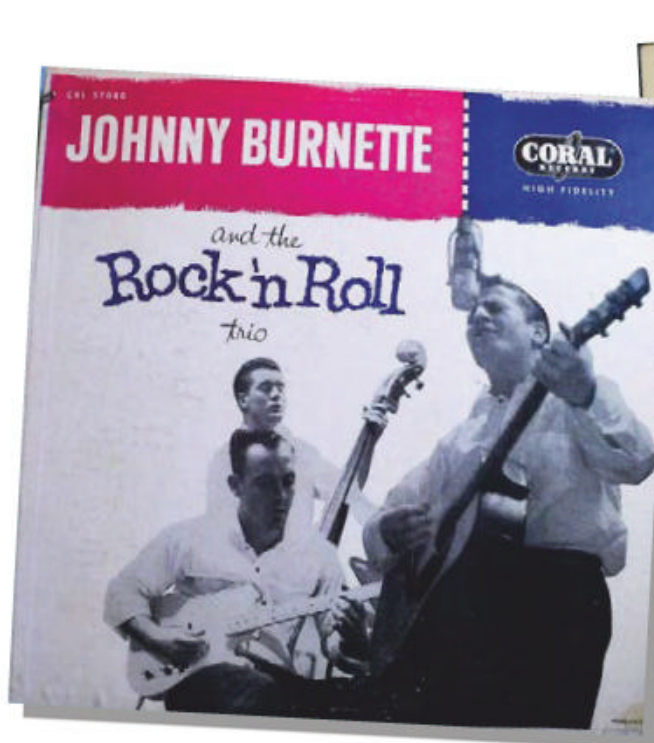


## THE BURNETTES AUDITIONED FOR SUN BUT WERE TOLD THEY SOUNDED TOO MUCH LIKE ELVIS

a Rocky 'n' Billy song..." before writing *Rocky 'n' Billy Boogie*, which became *Rock Billy Boogie*. It's a good story, but Rocky is reluctant to endorse it.

"Paul Burlison used to tell that story, but I can't..." He sucks his teeth. "When Paul said that to Dorsey, Dorsey said, 'Aw, I don't know...' It's one of those stories. As the years went by, in the 60s and 70s, you'd be surprised how many people would tell Johnny and Dorsey Burnette stories."

Rocky goes on to tell one about Roy Orbison visiting the Burnettes at the famous Peabody Hotel in Memphis. "Roy pushed the elevator button, the door opened and my dad and Dorsey were down on the ground fighting with each other. The Peabody ducks were walking past and everything!"



he recalls with a laugh. "My dad was the spark plug," Rocky adds. "He would start it, then Dorsey would finish it, because my dad wasn't half the size of Dorsey. Dorsey was 6'2" and he was a professional fighter, and my dad was four or five inches shorter."

### EARLY SMASHES

After leaving high school, Dorsey and Burlison became electricians at the Crown

Electric Company, where Elvis drove a truck, while Johnny became a barge hand on the Mississippi.

Johnny also teamed up with his country music namesake, Johnny Cash, to sell 'unbreakable' plates door-to-door.

"Cash sold one to his parents and my dad sold one to my grandmother and that was it," Rocky chuckles. "So Cash says, 'Let's work together. When the lady comes out I'll say, 'Have you ever seen anything like this?' Then you drop the plate and when she sees that it doesn't break we'll sell some to her'."

"So they go up to a house in South Memphis. Cash says, 'How would you like something like this?' My dad dropped the plate and it busted into 10 pieces! The lady was like, 'You boys get out of here!'."

"After that, my dad said, 'I know a guy that's selling televisions. Let's sell some televisions'. So once again, Cash's family bought one, my family bought one and that's all they were able to sell. They said, 'To hell with it, let's just try to get some more gigs'. About six months later, Cash was a big star."

### TEARIN' IT UP

When Elvis signed to Sun Records, the Burnettes auditioned, too, but were told they sounded too much like Presley. Undaunted, they headed for New York, where they became three-time winners on Ted Mack's *The Original Amateur Hour*, a nationally televised talent show that was the *X-Factor* of its day. Their success on the show won them a deal with Coral Records.

"Capitol also wanted to sign them," Rocky reveals, "so when they told Capitol they were going with Coral, they said, 'But we've got a friend called Gene Vincent who's incredible'. They were always helping people and were instrumental in getting Gene a deal."

Ironically, it was Vincent's career that



Johnny Burnette takes centre stage with the Rock 'n Roll Trio



took off, with *Be-Bop-A-Lula*, while a handful of singles from the newly-named Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n Roll Trio's one self-titled album failed to find more than regional success.

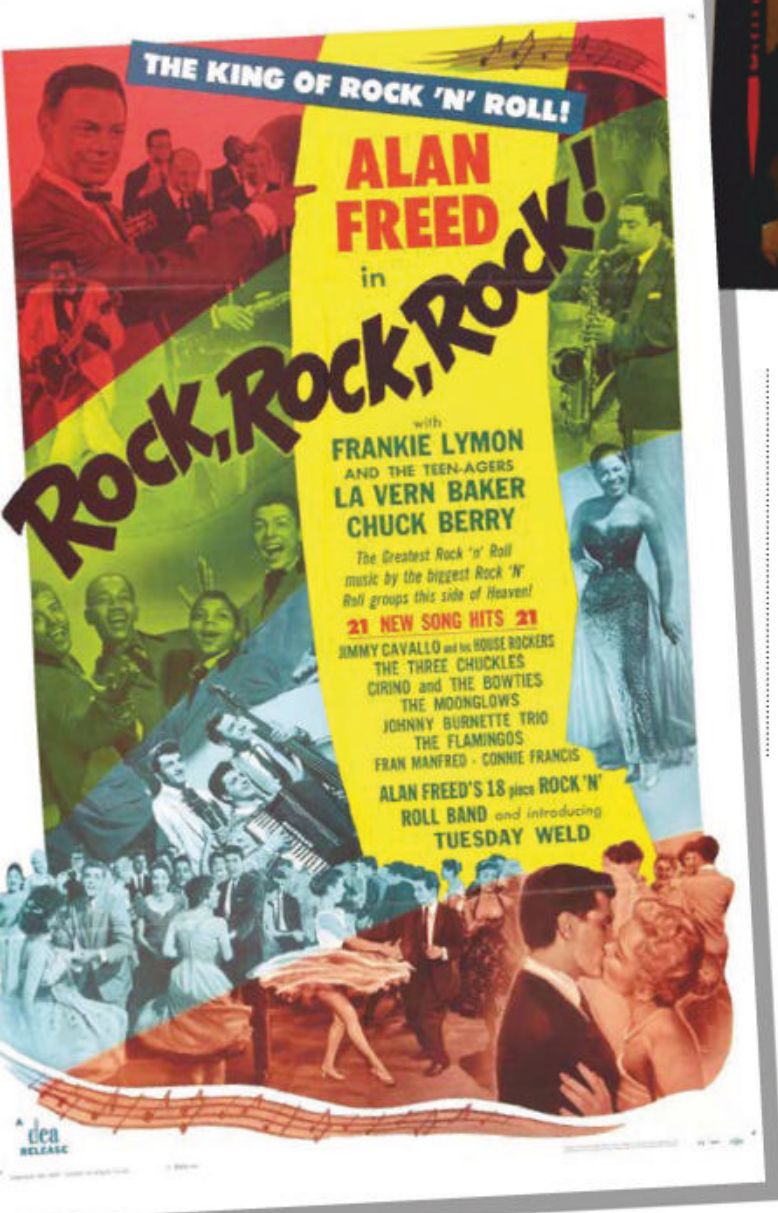
If the Burnettes were wild, then their pal Gene was wilder, says Rocky.

"He'd get Dorsey, Paul and my dad in a lot of trouble. The wives didn't like him because every time Gene showed up they knew there was gonna be trouble. Gene was gonna take 'em out and do that wild stuff he did. He had a lot of James Dean in him."

Other close friends of the Burnettes included the bass-playing brothers Johnny and Bill Black, who also grew up in Lauderdale Courts.

"Johnny was going to be the original bass player for Elvis," says Rocky. "When Elvis was told Sam Phillips wanted him to go in and record some stuff he said, 'Let me call Johnny to play bass'. Bill answered the phone and said, 'Johnny's in Texas, helping my grandmother with her roof, but I'll come down and play with you'. So that's how Bill got the gig with Elvis instead of Johnny."

"Later on, Johnny Black was in the movie, *Rock, Rock, Rock!*, playing bass for the Rock'n'roll Trio instead of Dorsey. Oh man, Dorsey and



my dad didn't talk to each other for a year after that!"

Another bone of contention for Dorsey was his brother's prominent billing.

"My dad actually quit the band because he wanted to keep calling it the Rock 'n Roll Trio," says Billy. "Then somebody at the label or whatever said, 'let's call it Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n Roll Trio'. That pissed my dad off."

#### ROCKIN' WITH RICK

The siblings reconciled when the Trio

recordings failed to yield a hit and Dorsey invited his younger brother to relocate with him to California and pursue a new career as songwriters.

The tough guys, who Elvis had nicknamed the Daltons after one of America's most wanted gangs, took an aggressive approach to pitching songs. They lay in wait outside Ricky Nelson's house and ambushed the young singer when he returned home. Dorsey pinned him to the lawn while Johnny began singing with his guitar.

**THEY LAY IN WAIT OUTSIDE RICKY NELSON'S HOUSE AND AMBUSHED THE YOUNG SINGER WHEN HE RETURNED HOME**







Johnny signed a contract with Liberty Records subsidiary Freedom in 1958



## WHEN ROCKY RELEASED *Tired Of Toein' The Line*, Ricky Nelson repaid him for the songs Johnny and Dorsey wrote

The approach worked and Nelson was soon enjoying a string of Burnette-penned hits, including *Waitin' In School* (No.18), *Believe What You Say* (No.8), *It's Late* (No.9) and *Just A Little Too Much* (No.9).

Rocky remembers the day Johnny and Dorsey went to collect their royalty cheques. "The wives were so excited, because the cheques were like \$20,000 apiece and these were country boys who were used to making \$50 or \$100 a week. That night, we all waited up for them to come back with the dough... and they never came home.

"We waited all the next day. By now, the wives were crying and my grandmother was pissed off, saying, 'Wait until I get a-hold of them boys!'

"It's about dark and here they finally come. They both drove up in two brand new Cadillacs. My mother, grandmother and aunt were fit to be tied, they were so

upset. Back then, you could get a Cadillac for \$4,000 or \$5,000, but that was still a big chunk out of their pay. But they were typical country boys: get rich, buy Cadillacs!"

Speaking of Nelson reminds Rocky of the day that the singer met Johnny and Dorsey's father. "My grandfather got his hand cut off in the coal mines. He actually

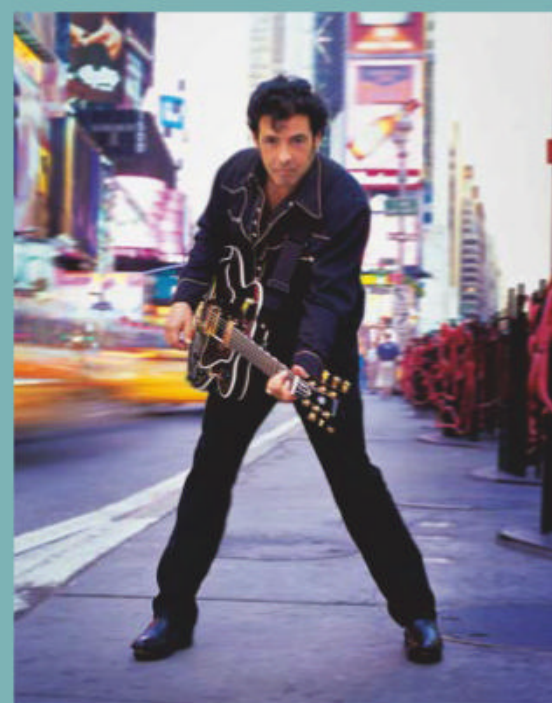
got it cut off by a coal cart while pushing another guy out of the way and saving his life.

"He was left with a portion of his index finger and thumb, and it was like a lobster claw.

"One day, we were having Sunday dinner and grandpa says, 'You boys never take me over to Ricky Nelson's house.

Are you embarrassed by me because I'm handicapped?' They said, 'No, Daddy,' and they took him right over.

"They told Ricky, 'This is our dad, Dorsey Sr, and he really wanted to meet you'. Grandpa stuck out that lobster claw and they said Ricky turned white as a ghost!" ➔



## ROCKY 'N' BILLY BOOGIE

Born in 1953, both Rocky Burnette and his cousin Billy were born to boogie. They were the inspiration for the Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n Roll Trio song *Rock Billy Boogie*.

"Me and Billy used to take these little rubber toilet plungers, slam them on the linoleum floor and make like they were microphones. We'd pretend we were the Rock 'n Roll Trio," remembers Rocky, the son of Johnny Burnette.

Billy (pictured above), the son of Dorsey Burnette, remembers joining the Rock 'n Roll Trio on stage to sing *Hound Dog* when he was three-and-a-half years old.

"Johnny said, 'Never again!'" Billy laughs. "Because you can't follow a kid or an animal, you know?"

Billy made his first record, a duet with Rick Nelson on *Hey Daddy (I'm Gonna Tell Santa On You)*, when he was seven years old. He went on to write songs for a range of artists including Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison and Ray Charles.

He also spent eight years in Fleetwood Mac, where he closed every show with his dad and uncle's rockabilly classic *Tear It Up*.

Billy Burnette's rockabilly albums include *Memphis In Manhattan* and *Rock N' Roll With It*. He recently wrote a book about his life and famous family, *Crazy Like Me*, released alongside an LP of the same title.

Rocky Burnette's biggest success was with *Tired Of Toein' The Line*, a Top 10 in America in 1980 that also reached No.1 in Australia. His latest album, released in November 2019, was called *Rock Solid*.



# DEATH ON THE LAKE

Johnny Burnette died at around 9.40pm on 14 August 1964, when a cabin cruiser ran into his unlit fishing boat on Clear Lake, California. Also in the skiff were family friend Michael D'Angelo and D'Angelo's 13-year-old daughter Liz. Michael and Liz climbed back aboard, but the 30-year-old Burnette never surfaced. His body wasn't found until the Sunday morning.

"It was the last day of the vacation," remembers Rocky. "Liz said, 'All the boys got to go fishing and I never got to go'. So instead of leaving that afternoon, Mike, my dad and Liz went back out one more time."

Rocky, aged 11, was on the shore with his nine-year-old brother Randy when they last saw their father.

"He said, 'We're gonna take Liz out one more time, so help your mom get ready, load up the car and as soon as we get back we'll take off for home'.

"My dad was in a sleeveless T-shirt that showed a rose tattoo with his name on his shoulder. My brother was playing with the tattoo, and my dad said, 'You boys promise you'll never get one of these. I don't want you to have any tattoos, you promise?'

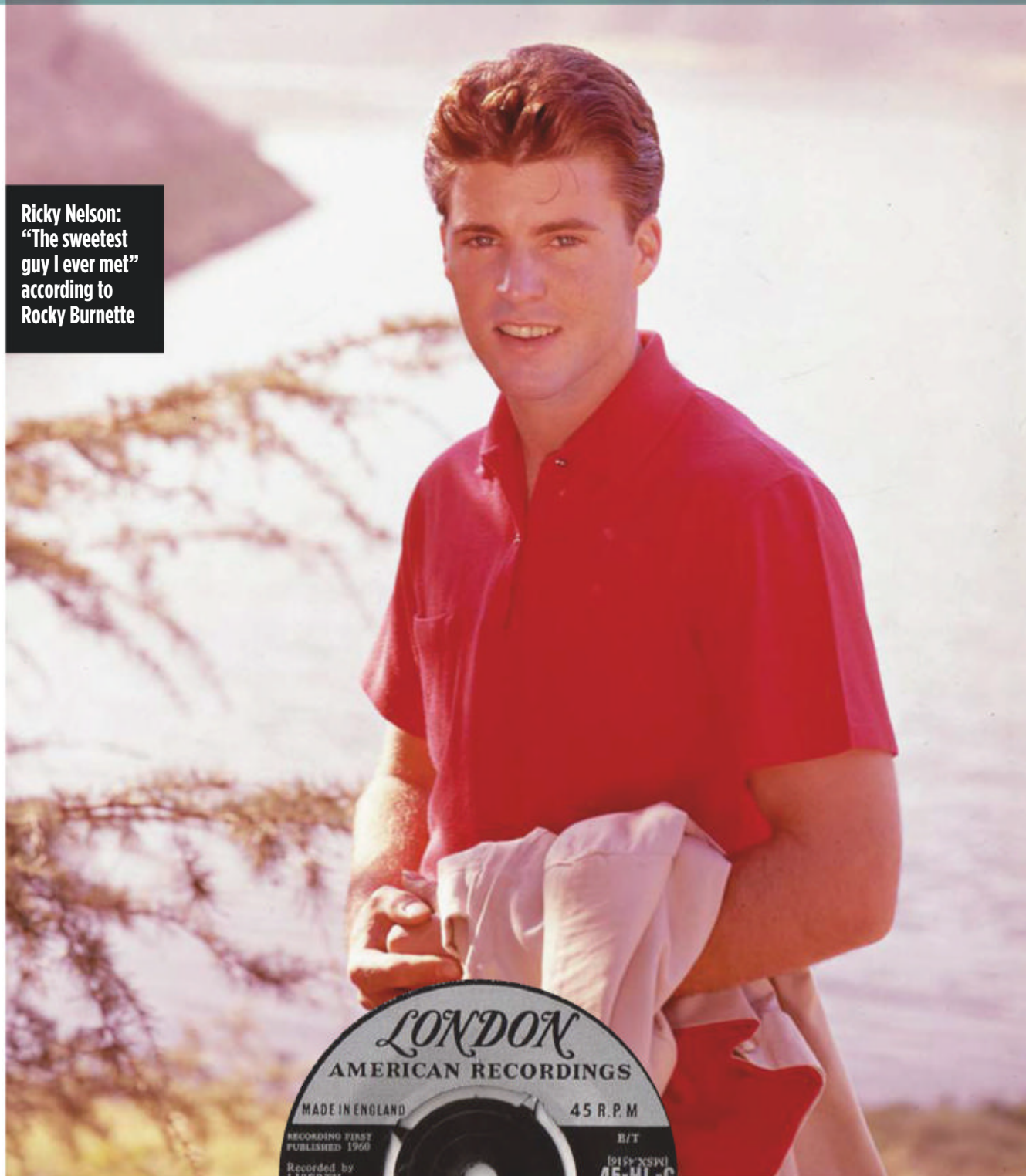
"We went, 'Yeah, we promise'. To this day, me and Randy don't have any tattoos. But the reason he said that was because he had come up for the part that John Ashley played in the *Beach Party* movies. They didn't want any kids in that show with tattoos, so John Ashley got the part and they went on to make like five of those *Beach Party* movies.

"One of them would have been filmed the week we had that vacation, so if he'd have got that part he wouldn't have gone to the lake and he wouldn't have drowned."

In 1980, when Rocky released his hit single *Tired Of Toein' The Line*, Nelson repaid him with a favour for the songs Johnny and Dorsey had written for him.

"Rick Nelson was the sweetest guy I ever met," says Rocky. "He cut *Tired Of Toein' The Line* before I did and it was going to

Ricky Nelson:  
"The sweetest  
guy I ever met"  
according to  
Rocky Burnette



be his single. But when he heard that I had a hit going up the charts in England and that it had been a No.1 song in Holland, he stepped back and said, 'Let him have his shot with it in America'. If he had put his record out, mine might never have made it."

Rocky's version reached No.8 in America, No.4 in Canada and No.1 in Australia.

## DREAMIN' UP HITS

The Rick Nelson hits encouraged Johnny and Dorsey to return to recording. When Willie Nelson turned down the folk-pop ballad *Tall Oak Tree*, Dorsey released it himself and scored a Top 30 hit in 1960.

It was Johnny who enjoyed the greatest success, however, when *Dreamin'*, written by Barry De Vorzon and Ted Ellis, reached No.11 in the US and No.5 in the UK.

The follow-up, *You're Sixteen*, penned by the Sherman Brothers, did even better, hitting No.8 in America and No.3 in Britain.

Produced by Snuff Garrett, the catchy, strings-laden singles sounded very different to the raw and aggressive recordings of the Rock 'n Roll Trio, but in their way were just as influential and shaped the sound of

American pop prior to the emergence of The Beatles.

"After that, everybody from Bobby Vinton to Dean Martin was using violins the way my dad did," Rocky boasts. "Everything that was recorded after 1962 sounds just like *Dreamin'* and *You're Sixteen*."

Burnette also scored Top 20 hits with *Little Boy Sad* and *God, Country and My Baby*. Looking back on his father's fame, Rocky explains: "We had such a yo-yo existence. We were up and then we were down. When *Dreamin'* and *You're Sixteen* came out, boy, all of a sudden my dad was getting the TV work he needed. He was doing the international tours. He had his own record company. The first act that he signed to the label was Karen and Richard Carpenter."

Tragically, Johnny's life was cut short at the age of 30 on the evening of 14 August 1964, when a cabin cruiser ran into his unlit fishing boat on Clear Lake, California.

The loss was a profound blow to Dorsey, says Rocky. "They fought, like a lot of brothers do, but they loved each other. They depended on each other. When my dad died, Dorsey was never the same again."





## REDISCOVERED ONCE MORE

At the time of Burnette's death, the Rock 'n Roll Trio was all but forgotten in America, as was rockabilly itself. On the cusp of the 1970s, Rocky remembers: "We were all standing outside Dorsey's house when this old jalopy of a Cadillac drove up with a convertible top that had holes in it.

"This kinda chubby guy got out and walked over to us. Dorsey was looking at this guy like, what's going on here? The guy looked up at him with tears in his eyes and said, 'You don't remember me, do ya, Dorse?'

"My uncle said, 'Gene, is that you?' It was Gene Vincent. He was bloated and unhealthy. He hugged Dorsey and said in his ear, 'They don't remember us anymore, Dorse. They don't care about us anymore'.

"He came in the house and we had a wonderful day telling all the old stories. Just a few months later, Gene passed away. Everybody in my family was upset."

During the 70s, Dorsey focused on country music and had a string of small but regular hits on the country chart, the biggest being *In The Spring* (*The Roses Always Turn Red*) (No.21), *Darlin' (Don't Come Back)* (No.26) and *Things I Treasure* (No.31).

Dorsey's songs recorded by other artists include *As Long As I Live* (Jerry Lee Lewis), *Here Comes That Feeling* (Brenda Lee) and *Sad Boy* (Stevie Wonder).

The latter song was about a boy drowning and, released just before Johnny's death, spookily prescient.

Dorsey also met an early death, from a heart attack on 19 August 1979, aged 46. It was just before the rockabilly revival that brought the Rock 'n Roll Trio acclaim.

"If Dorsey had realised how many fans

## DURING THE 70s, DORSEY HAD A STRING OF HITS ON THE COUNTRY CHART

# UNDER THE INFLUENCE: PAUL ANSELL

## NUMBER NINE MAIN MAN



Among the many musicians inspired by Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n Roll Trio is British singer Paul Ansell, the charismatic frontman of one of the most popular bands on the rockin' scene for the past 25 years, Number Nine. His albums include *Sweet Inspirations* and *Countryfied*.

How did you come first across Johnny Burnette and his music?

"I noticed his name was on a compilation with people like Bobby Vee and Johnny Tillotson, and there was a Johnny Burnette song: *Dreamin'*. I loved his voice. Then I discovered the Rock 'n Roll Trio and that was a big influence on me. I would have been listening to rockabilly for about six months at that point. I'd discovered Elvis and started tracing the big boys – Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly – and I found the Rock 'n Roll Trio after that. I would have been about 14 years old."

Have you recorded any of the Rock 'n Roll Trio's songs?

"I recorded *Lonesome Train*. But that stuff is so good that you've really got to think before you cover something like that."

Have you ever had the pleasure of meeting any of the Burnettes?

"I've done quite a few shows with Rocky. I met him about 25 years ago when I used to play a basement in the West End called Break For The Border. He came in with Paul Burlison and they got up and played with us all night. So I got to play *Tear It Up* with Paul on guitar,

and to sing *Lonesome Train* with Rocky. We got drunk and had a fantastic night."

Did they share any stories from the old days?

"They told me a couple which I can't repeat, they were filthy! But the one I remember is that according to Paul, if Elvis saw Johnny and Dorsey coming down the road, he would cross over. I can believe it, because he had a pretty face and wouldn't want to get it messed up – they were like street fighters."

What was Paul Burlison like?

"Paul was how you'd expect a rock'n'roll guitar player to be. Scotty Moore could be fun. He had a great sense of humour, but he was more quiet and gentlemanly in his behaviour. Paul Burlison was like a rockabilly who'd got old! He was a lovely character and a great guitar player. I think he was surprised that people were going mad about the old records. It was a great chance for him to see the world and get some credit."

Where would you put the Rock 'n Roll Trio in the rockabilly hierarchy?

"I would say their album is one of the three or four most important rockabilly albums of all time. It's at the highest level."

he had in England, Europe, Australia and Japan, it would have kept him alive another 10 or 15 years," says Rocky.

As it was, it was only when their own singing careers took off that Rocky and Billy Burnette learned the full scale of their father's influence.

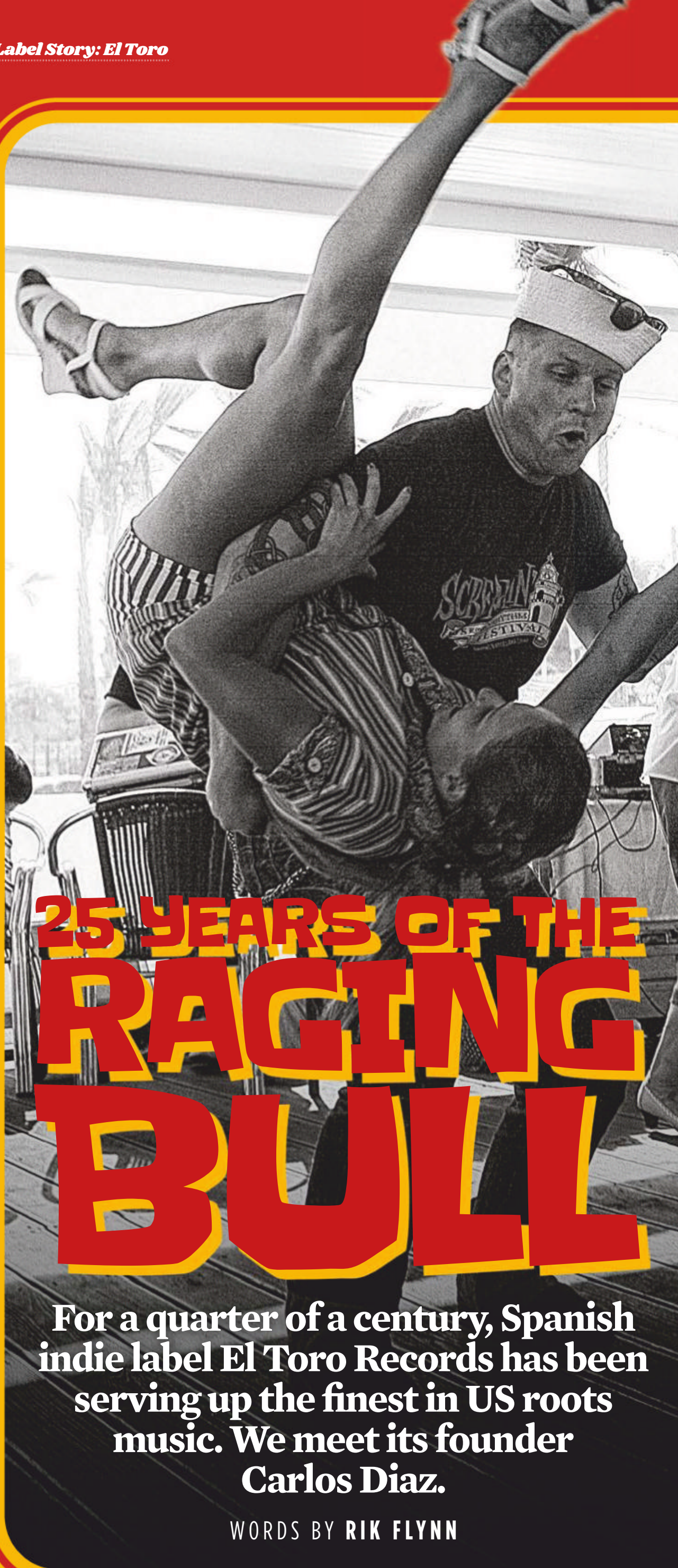
"Paul McCartney told me he and John Lennon would get up every morning and the first record they'd put on was the Rock 'n Roll Trio, that was their favourite record," says Billy. "The Beatles did *Lonesome Tears In My Eyes* and the first song Led Zeppelin rehearsed was *Train Kept A-Rollin'*."

"Neil Sedaka gave me a big hug and said,

'Your dad is one of the biggest stars that ever lived'," adds Rocky. "Mick Green from Johnny Kidd and the Pirates said, 'We were sitting in the movie theatres when we saw the Rock 'n roll Trio in *Rock, Rock, Rock!* and that's what got us into the music business'. Elvis, when he died, had seven Johnny and Dorsey things on his jukebox at his house."

The influence of Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n roll Trio can be heard in every rockabilly band on the scene. Asked where he'd put them in the rockabilly hierarchy, Billy answers, "I would have to say they were No.1." ★





# 25 YEARS OF THE RAGING BULL

For a quarter of a century, Spanish indie label El Toro Records has been serving up the finest in US roots music. We meet its founder Carlos Diaz.

WORDS BY RIK FLYNN

**W**hile the country's relationship with the bull is not without controversy, the image of 'el toro' remains synonymous with Spain. Anyone who's holidayed there will almost certainly have driven past one of its many giant 50ft 'Toro de Osborne' roadside advertising boards cut into that imposing jet black silhouette, noble horns and ample *cojones* on full display. Originally designed and erected to promote Osborne brandy, the first of these emblematic steers was raised in 1956, just as *Heartbreak Hotel* gave Elvis his first No.1 – and the year that London's 2i's Coffee Bar first opened its doors. But beyond these arbitrary coincidences, the bull is surely as apt a symbol as any to represent the wild, restless spirit of rockabilly. It's no wonder Carlos Diaz chose to name his label El Toro.

Back in 1996, just north east of Barcelona, a younger Carlos was fully charged, scraping his hoof in the dirt, ready to pile headlong into the rockabilly throng. In 2021, El Toro celebrates an incredible 25 years in the business. But it hasn't been an easy journey. In truth, Diaz's life is an absorbing tale of obsession, tenacity, tragedy and an unflinching love of rock'n'roll that has seen him through. Right now, though, there's yet another mountain to climb.

Things were looking rosy as 2020 got under way, with a string of high-quality releases still warm from the pressing plant. The Country Side Of Harmonica Sam's eloquent *Broken Bottle*, *Broken Heart*, Italian songstress Mel Peekaboo's brilliant and varied *Straight To Your Heart*, and a bold return from Indiana rockabilly Jerry King meant the bull was on the charge... and then Covid hit.

"*Broken Bottle*, *Broken Heart* had just taken off and seemed to have no limits, but suddenly the world stopped and, with it, the record sales," says Diaz. "Our five new rockabilly EPs had just arrived, too – Eddie Cochran, Johnny Cash, Dorsey Burnette, Ricky Nelson and The Poe Kats – so we decided to release them when the worst was over."

Thankfully, most of the EPs have since sold out, yet without live shows to push the new blood, things are very much in limbo. But if there's one thing we've learnt about Diaz, it's that his bullish spirit won't allow him to sit still for long...

So, just how did a young Catalan kid, without a word of English, become the





Carlos, above, aged 14 and, right, at El Toro headquarters



**El Toro RECORDS**  
**\* 25<sup>TH</sup> \***  
*Anniversary*

lynchpin of the rock'n'roll scene in Spain?

While most of his classmates flared up and boogied down to disco at the close of the 70s, our "shy and introverted" 13-year-old was already pure rock'n'roll. Within the grooves of the Big Beat, Carlos could finally express himself: "I found a way to show my rebellion when I had the opportunity to join the rockers' gangs that arose in the suburbs of Barcelona."

On the northern periphery of the city lies the municipality of Badalona, Diaz's birthplace, and the site of his emancipation. It was here that he formed his first such gang with his four brothers and, together with a few like-minded friends, forged their own rockin' scene, picking up English from lyrics, album sleeves and films such as *American Graffiti* and *The Wanderers*.

It was a pivotal time to be a rocker in Spain. With Elvis gone in '77, and Spain finally (truly) out from under the late Franco's authoritarian regime by '78, democracy arrived – and, to the Diaz brothers, freedom meant rock'n'roll. For one, Elvis' catalogue was finally available in Spain, shaking things up immediately.

"It pushed the record companies towards rock'n'roll, and modern artists such as Robert Gordon, Rocky Sharpe, Crazy Cavan and The Boppers arrived, selling big and getting airplay – even Sleepy LaBeef made it to the charts and toured Spain. Suddenly, we found more cool music than our pockets could afford, but not enough! A few years later, we started to travel to Andorra to get the French pressings of Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran and so many others."

Just before Diaz's 15th birthday, in 1981, Bill Haley passed away, and yet another wave of rock hit Spain's media with live clips of the greats ransacking the lounges of the nation. By his 16th, he'd seen the Stray Cats fire up in his home town, their first show in Spain – "astonishing for my young ears!" he beams. Onward to '83 and the acquisition



of Gene Vincent's *Forever* LP, then Ray Campi's *Rockabilly Rebel*, and on... Carlos scouted labels such as Finland's Goofin' Records, Bear Family and Ace, but in

## LABEL STAR Q&A

# THE COUNTRY SIDE OF HARMONICA SAM

**We've followed Swedish five-piece The Country Side Of Harmonica Sam since 2008's superb *Rocker No.1* LP, but his current colour co-ordinated line-up take things up a notch, recently winning Best Honky Tonk Group at the Ameripolitans. We caught up with lead guitarist Johan Bandling Melin...**

### Is there a big country scene in Sweden?

There's always been a solid rockabilly and blues scene, but the country scene is not that big. We all played in different country, bluegrass, western swing and blues bands before, and shared a common interest in 50s and 60s country, so we got together to give it a try. In our earlier bands we've always had great female singers, but it wasn't until Sam was persuaded to sing country instead of blues that all the pieces fell into place.

### Were you all long-term friends?

We started around nine years ago and got together weekly to play country songs from the golden era, 1959-1961. We then decided to record some and that resulted in the *Changing Her Thinking/Your Old Standby 7"*.

### What was it about that record that caused such an immediate buzz?

We found the track on an old recording by Johnny Dollar and liked it a lot. It was the first recording we ever did and we hadn't found our style and sound yet, but that gave it a

certain energy and vibe. We sent that 7" to all of the European record companies we could think of, and Carlos was the only one who showed any interest. He took a chance on us. We didn't expect anybody else to like mid-tempo country shuffles as much as we do!

### A few years later, *Lookout Heart* was another big one for El Toro...

We host a monthly club in Malmö called The Grand New Opry. One night, we had a DJ called Lina Nordentorp, who had a great collection of obscure hillbilly seven-inches. That night, she played the original recording of *Lookout Heart* with Coy Jackson and we all fell in love with it.



### You've played Carlos' festival a few times. Any standout moments?

It's always great to play Screamin'! It's nice to hang out at the beach bar during the day and listen to great rockabilly. A memory that comes to mind was when we had dinner and bumped into James Intveld and Kid Ramos. We talked James into joining us on the old Wynn Stewart song *It's Such A Pretty World Today*, that we knew we'd both recorded.

### What are your best memories of the band?

Playing in Texas and Tennessee is hard to beat! But it's amazing we've got to travel around Europe and visit so many amazing places. You can't take that for granted anymore and it makes you appreciate it so much more now when you look at it in the rearview mirror.



## LABEL STAR Q&A WISEGUYZ

Formed at the turn of the millennium out of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, WiseGuyz serve up the strong stuff: wild and greasy, down-to-business rockabilly to be precise. We spoke to frontman Chris Bird...

### What led you to rock'n'roll in the first place?

My aunt. When I was three, she came home late and there was a quarrel, which woke me up. She turned on an Elvis vinyl, I came to her room and she sat me on her knee and told me about rock'n'roll. When I was 12-14, I was into metal and punk, but when I turned 15, I discovered psychobilly and then rockabilly, swing, surf and western swing. I remembered that Elvis story and fell in love with rock'n'roll.

### Is rock'n'roll big in Ukraine?

There are not that many bands and our audience is mixed, about seven psychobilly bands, seven rockabilly/R&B/swing bands and about four surf bands. We all hang out



together. We have three big festivals: Ukrabilly Bang in spring, Blaxie Rumble in summer and Atomic Snow Ball in winter.

### You guys seem to embrace the old-school idea of rock'n'roll as rebellion. Is this for show or are you really bad boys?

(Laughs) We were a bit dangerous when we were younger, but lately we're focused on music and we're not looking for trouble. We're kinder now, but still able to bite if needed, just in case...

### How did you meet Carlos?

It was about 2010. I got an email from Leo Castro [Spanish DJ]. Leo said he liked our music and he'd like to introduce us to Carlos. We got in touch and started to discuss our publishing on El Toro. Later, we were invited to the Screamin'. Since then, we have a pretty warm and friendly relationship.

### Do you like that festival in particular?

It was a blast! Very good memories. One of the

most impressive moments for me was backing up Mr. Joe Clay. I remember listening to his songs from a cassette as a teen. I couldn't even imagine that I'd be the guitarist for him. Screamin' is a very friendly festival, everyone is like a big family.

### Who are your big inspirations?

Oh... this list is too long. Besides classic ones, I've been inspired by modern artists: Big Sandy, Deke Dickerson, Pat Capocci, Space Cadets, Bloodshot Bill, Lucky Stars, artists from Tail Records, Lightning Records, Wild Records...

### How are you keeping yourself busy in the current climate?

I formed a new line-up in November last year, so we have been practising, composing new songs and shooting music videos. Besides WiseGuyz, we have side projects, so we've used all this free time to finish old plans. We finished the second album from our experimental surf-rock studio project, SPTP, and we recorded a debut with our surf-rock band, Cobra Twist. We also have another band with a female vocalist, Jungle Bird, and we had time to compose and rehearse new songs with her.

particular, Rollin' Rock and its boss Ronny Weiser. "It fascinated me how he personalised each and every one of the albums, always leaving his name clear in the credits," Diaz enthuses. "He even put his signature on the labels, making it clear that it was done with a lot of love and with a lot of his personality."

Inspired, Diaz put pen to paper... and got a reply. "I was fascinated that I could communicate with someone on the other side of the pond – who was my hero – talk about our music, and discover that what I knew about his work was only the tip of the iceberg."

Diaz resolved to give others what Ronnie Weiser had given him. But first, military service. Stuck 1,000km from home and with a year on his hands, he started a fanzine, *Zero Drift*. He says: "It helped me to understand that I could create something about the music that I loved and make it reach other fans like me." With screenings of *La Bamba* and *Great Balls Of Fire* thrusting

## His first imprint was Oh! Boy Records, a home-run label, that took advantage of his enviable record collection

rock'n'roll into fashion, Diaz found himself in the right place at the right time.

His first imprint was Oh! Boy Records, a cassette-only home-run label, that took advantage of his enviable record collection and was stacked with sounds from Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly. Diaz offered this new generation of converts all-encompassing compilations at pocket



money prices, all the while putting profits back into the records and books that were his lifeblood.

In 1991, he answered an advert and was soon vice president of Badalona's Elvis Fan Club. Its president, Jorge M, would become a close ally. With growing membership, the pair founded an official magazine that is now about to toast 30 years in print. But Diaz wanted more. He parted company with the mag to start his own Spanish-language take on the rockin' scene. "*Rock Therapy* was published quarterly from 1994 to 1999," he expands. "The first copies were made in Spanish with a photocopier. Later on, they were professionally printed in Spanish and English. The last issue from January 1999 was in full colour in both languages and included a four-track vinyl EP."

Carlos was on the up, but it was during that period that his life changed forever when his daughter Sandra was born in September 1994, suffering brain damage that incapacitated her for life. "That



Carlos with Swedish discoveries  
The Country Side Of Harmonica Sam



Celebrating the first  
El Toro release with pizza  
and Champagne...



Carlos with Chris Bird,  
frontman of rockin'  
Ukrainians WiseGuyz



Dutch R&B  
rockers  
CC Jerome  
in full flight



Los Mambo Jambo on stage with special guests



The Screamin' festival is on hold due to Covid, but set to return in 2021





translated into an endless nightmare for two young first-time parents,” he relates.

Over two decades later, while he’s had time to process what happened, he and his wife still face constant issues, worsened by the pandemic. With Sandra in special care and unable to come home, they’ve only been able to steal half an hour, with her in full protective clothing. They’re unable to hug their daughter.

Through it all, rock’n’roll remains Diaz’s salvation. “My escape route from all the pressure was the magazine,” he remembers. “I spent whole nights working on it with one eye on my daughter and the other on my wife. Through the courts, trials, medical experts, psychologists... rock’n’roll saved my life. The second thing that would mark my life and my family during those years is what brings us here: El Toro Records.”

In March 1996 at a Carl Perkins show in Barcelona, Diaz vowed with Jorge M to start a label, exchanging records with other companies to sell in Jorge’s record store. By summer, El Toro had its inaugural release – from The Tennessee Boys. “They were four very young Portuguese guys in pursuit of the rockabilly dream with a great story behind them,” he reminisces. “They are, for me, one of the best bands ever. They had it all.”

By 2003, as the four-tonne ‘Toro de Osborne’ on the hillside in El Bruc, near Barcelona, was brought crashing to the ground by Catalanian militants, El Toro was very much on its feet. Diaz quit his job to take the reins and ride the bull alone.

Now, 25 years later, El Toro has become an icon amongst the faithful. “We have reinvented ourselves many times over the years,” adds Diaz. “Right now, a large part of the business is divided between vinyl and digital distribution, otherwise our spirit is the same.”

That spirit means listening to every demo sent his way, a dedication that’s provided the lion’s share of his recent signings. His criteria? “I must like what they do, that’s all,” he says simply.

It’s a varied roster that expands across the length and breadth of Europe. “We work with the best, no matter where they are from; we have almost the same number

## CARLOS DIAZ FINDS THE HOLY GRAIL ROCK ‘N ROLL TRIO FOOTAGE RESURFACES

There’s one treasure in the El Toro vault that makes Diaz supremely proud, and it’s his steadfast dedication to the cause that led to this particular miracle.

“Have you seen that clip on the internet of The Rock ‘n Roll Trio playing *Hound Dog* on Ted Mack’s *Amateur Hour* in New York City in 1956?” he asks. “It’s the only known footage of Johnny, Dorsey and Paul, that was lost, until I found it in 2007 at the Library Of Congress in Washington DC!”

Needless to say, the footage takes pride of place on El Toro’s compilation, *Shattered Dreams: The Rise and Fall of The Johnny Burnette R&R Trio*, but how did this all play out?

It all began one year earlier when Diaz was with Rocky Burnette recording his *Wampus Cat* album, cut in Barcelona with a band that featured the cream of the city’s rockin’ musicians. “Having a coffee in a bar near the studio, Rocky tells me he’s very excited, as he has something from his father to show me. He opens his laptop, takes a DVD

out of his bag and puts it in the computer. On the screen, his father appears playing *You’re Sixteen* and I think, ‘that’s fine, but it’s nothing special’. And then another video appears on the screen and it’s the whole trio doing *Hound Dog*! I couldn’t believe my eyes! The holy grail of rockabilly! It existed! An English friend had gifted it to Rocky on a recent visit to the UK with no further information, just those two performances on the DVD.

“Rocky was on a plane flying back to the US and I was already in my office determined to find that original video, certain that it existed. Several weeks later, my search took me to the Library Of Congress, where they kept a copy of that *Amateur Hour* show from September 1956, in full. How I got it, I keep it to myself, but in 2007 we released the holy grail for the enjoyment of rockabilly fans all around the world forever.”

Find the footage and more on El Toro’s 2007 CD/DVD package *Shattered Dreams: The Rise and Fall of The Johnny Burnette R&R Trio*.



of artists from Sweden, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands.” One of those prize acts is the top-selling The Country Side Of Harmonica Sam. “I knew Harmonica Sam from his

superb jump blues work, so when I was contacted by Peter, his steel guitarist, I knew what he had was good even before

listening. I have seen fans of flamenco music, who don’t know a word of English, crying at some of their songs!”

What else is in the pipeline? “We have an album by Ramblin’ Ellie & The Bashtones – also from Sweden – with support from

The Velvet Candles in what is going to be a fantastic job,” raves Carlos. “And we’re working on two *Sings Carlos Slap* singles, one featuring Gordon Doel from the Doel Brothers and another with Spencer Evoy from MFC Chicken – plus two new volumes of *Infamous Instro-Monsters*, all on vinyl.”

And what of his other passion, the now-infamous Screamin’ festival? “I’ve been the promoter since the first one in 1999 – 21 years in a row, until Covid showed up,” he says. “It’s always cool to see your own bands playing at your festival, especially when you feel you have ‘discovered’ them and you’re showing your find to the world! The Wise Guyz are an example – they never fail!”

While Screamin’ is on hold and we’re unlikely to see any of El Toro’s stable on stage any time soon, Diaz is as resolute as ever. “I have made my dream as a teenager come true. I’ve managed to work and feed my family through my passion. I live a very creative life, in which every day is a new adventure. I can’t ask for more.” ★



**Diaz quit his job to take the reins and ride the bull alone. 25 years later, El Toro is an icon among the faithful.**



Johnny Hallyday arrives  
at the Monte Carlo  
Rally, 17 January 1961



REPORTERS ASSOCIÉS/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY



# THE FRENCH CONNECTION

**During a tenure spanning well over half a century, Johnny Hallyday sold in excess of 100 million records, yet many people in English-speaking countries have never heard of him. *Vintage Rock* looks back on the ostentatious and tumultuous life of “the French Elvis”.**

WORDS BY DAVID BURKE

**J**ohnny Hallyday was just 14 when Elvis Presley entered his orbit – an experience that would change his life forever. “His voice, the way he moved, everything was sexy,” Hallyday, often dubbed “the French Elvis”, told *USA Today* in 2003. “The first time I saw him, I was paralysed.”

Within two years, following a television slot on *Paris Cocktail*, the former Jean-Philippe Smet had secured a deal with the Vogue imprint, supported Sacha Distel on tour and gained a mentor in Charles Aznavour. His star was in the ascendant.

Not bad for a boy from the ninth *arrondissement* of Paris whose parents – Léon, a nightclub performer, and Huguette, a model – split up shortly after he was born, leaving Jean-Philippe to be raised by his paternal aunt, a former silent movie star. According to one story, Leon only married Huguette to allay the gossip that little Jean-Philippe was fathered by a German soldier during the Nazis’ occupation of France.

Jean-Philippe served his entertainment apprenticeship alongside cousins Menen and Desta, and the latter’s American dancer husband, Lee Halliday, who became something of a father figure. It was Halliday who taught the blond-haired, blue-eyed youngster how to play guitar and violin, and how to dance. And it was Halliday who introduced him to American music. “Lee’s family used to send me records you could not find in France,” Hallyday recalled to *The Times*. “That is how I discovered Little Richard, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran

and Fats Domino. When I started to sing, rock’n’roll was not a music that French people knew very much. Paris was more into jazz and the Edith Piaf type of chanson.”

The family later relocated to London briefly for work. Hallyday claimed that while there he became “very good friends” with Jimi Hendrix, Mick Jagger, John Lennon and Rod Stewart, adding, perhaps rather fancifully, “We’d all record in the different studios and meet for tea”.

In homage to his Oklahoma cousin-in-law, who used to call Jean-Philippe ‘Johnny’, the youngster adopted his surname as a stage moniker, though an early record sleeve misprint meant he would be forever known as Johnny Hallyday rather than Johnny Halliday.

**WITH THE ARRIVAL** of Elvis, the newly-monikered Hallyday cut his teeth at the Moulin Rouge and on American bases in his native France, doing a more than adequate impersonation of the Memphis Lip himself. It was only a matter of time until he got noticed by a label. Vogue released his debut single, *Laisse Les Filles*, in 1960. Its moderate success was eclipsed by the follow-up, *Souvenirs, Souvenirs*, which turned him into a fully-fledged teen idol. In 1961, Hallyday scored his biggest hit yet with a cover of *Let’s Twist Again* (*Viens Danser Le Twist*), which shifted over a million copies, topping the charts in most European territories (though not the UK), and caused a stir – and a mini-riot – with his high-octane appearance at the Festival de Rock in

Paris. He offered up Francophone takes on Chuck Berry’s *Roll Over Beethoven* and *Johnny B. Goode*, Little Richard’s *Tutti Frutti* and *Long Tall Sally* and The Everly Brothers’ *Cathy’s Clown*, inspiring the ye-ye movement, a generation of singers renowned for re-versioning rock’n’roll and pop songs *en Français*, which included Serge Gainsbourg and Françoise Hardy. “It was rebellious music at the time,” he said. “We had black leather jackets. Some of them used to destroy all the seats in the concerts.”

1962’s *Johnny Hallyday Sings America’s Rockin’ Hits*, recorded in Nashville, was a laudable attempt at singing in English. And while it earned Hallyday a spot on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the American mainstream didn’t buy into the bequipped “French Elvis”, as he became known.

Hallyday returned to what he did best, cutting renditions of UK and US chart hits in his own language, including The Animals’ *House Of The Rising Sun*, Stevie Wonder’s *Uptight* and The Crystals’ *Da Doo Ron Ron*, singular renditions defined by astute translations and his trademark dramatic delivery. But his failure to crack the States, and near-neighbour Britain, was a source of frustration to him. “I would very much like to be well known in England,” he admitted to Sylvia Stephen in an interview for *Fabulous* magazine. “I like very much the English audiences. They are much warmer than French audiences. Here [in France], people do not scream and cheer when you sing. They clap.”

Then the Army came calling. Just like his idol Elvis, Hallyday was conscripted for military service. His year-long stint in West Germany (during which he married ye-ye contemporary and Belgian chanteuse Sylvie Vartan, while on leave) won

**WITH THE ADVENT OF ELVIS, THE NEWLY-MONIKERED HALLYDAY CUT HIS TEETH AT THE MOULIN ROUGE**



## THE MID-60S HAD EXPLODED INTO A COUNTER-CULTURAL REVOLUTION

over that section of the French public not enamoured with his maverick persona. But the times had certainly changed during his brief sabbatical from the music scene. The mid-60s had exploded into a counter-cultural revolution and communal love was in the air as the hippie generation explored psychedelia, sexual mores and altered states of consciousness. Hallyday found himself woefully out of step, not least on his scathing put-down of flower power *Cheveux Longs, Idées Courtes* (*Long Hair, Short Ideas*), on which he proclaimed, “If Mr Kennedy would return today/ Or if Mr Gandhi would suddenly resurrect/ They would be amazed when they would be told/ That to change the world singing is enough”.

**HIS SURVIVAL INSTINCT** kicked in at some point, and he embraced the new sounds, largely due to the influence of guitarist Mick Jones (later of Spooky Tooth and Foreigner) and drummer Tommy Brown. Under the auspices of The Blackburds, they furnished him with an impressive repertoire of Mod-ish material, the best of which can be heard on *La Génération Perdue*. Among Hallyday’s other collaborators during this particularly fertile period were Jimmy Page and Peter Frampton and the Small Faces on the following year’s *Riviere... Ouvre Ton Lit*, as his cool quotient increased exponentially.

He even booked The Jimi Hendrix Experience as his support act, having met the legendary guitarist on a trip to London. Hallyday would later go on to release his own interpretation of Hendrix’s *Hey Joe*.

While the early years of the 1970s saw him further the hippie cause with *Vie* (*Essayez* championed “love, peace and freedom” and condemned “war mongers”, and *La Fille Aux Cheveux Clairs* channelled his inner-protest-era Bob Dylan), and the single *Jésus Christ (Est Un Hippie)*, the rest of the decade was characterised by his flirtations with several different genres, perhaps best encapsulated on 1972’s *Country-Folk-Rock*. There was a brief return to his rock’n’roll roots on 1974’s *Rock ’n Slow*, featuring selections by his beloved Elvis, Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and The



Johnny Hallyday with Catherine Deneuve in the 1962 film *Les Parisiennes*

## CHANGING PLACES HALLYDAY ON THE BIG SCREEN

Like his idol Elvis, Johnny Hallyday made a seamless transition from stage to screen, though with considerably more creatively satisfying results. His first uncredited role was in the 1955 movie *Les Diaboliques*, followed in 1962 by a more prominent part alongside the legendary Catherine Deneuve in *Les Parisiennes*. But it wasn’t until he starred in cult director Jean-Luc Godard’s 1985 crime drama *Détective* that Hallyday’s cachet as an actor increased. “My image started to change,” he said. “I always try to play away from me, totally different from what I am as a singer. The best compliment someone can give me is, ‘We forgot you were Johnny Hallyday’. I take acting very seriously.”

The best reviews of his thespian career came for Patrice Leconte’s 2002 feature *The Man On The Train*, in which he shared top billing alongside Jean Rochefort. Hallyday had invited Leconte to dinner after meeting him at an awards ceremony several years earlier. “I told Patrice I would love to be filmed by him. I have seen all his movies, and he is a director I love. And if I didn’t tell him I wanted to work with him, he never would have thought of me.” It turned out to be a perfect fit.

“He didn’t give me the script,” Hallyday recalled of the experience. “He said, ‘I have a story for you. That’s all for now’.”

Shortly after *The Man On The Train*, he shot *Crime Spree*, a comedy in English, with Harvey Keitel and Gérard Depardieu. Hallyday and compatriot Depardieu play a couple of stupid gang members hired to rob a house in Chicago. They pick the wrong house, which happens to be owned by Mafia boss Keitel.



A 69-year-old Hallyday  
on stage at the Royal Albert  
Hall, London, 16 October 2012





Rolling Stones. By then, Jones and Mallory had moved on to other things.

There was also an ill-advised attempt at prog-rock on 1976's *Hamlet*, a double set influenced by Shakespeare's classic play. "I like the story," he explained. "I don't know exactly why. There are certain reasons, profound reasons. But it's not important."

If much of Hallyday's recorded output during this period was underwhelming, he established himself as a live tour-de-force, invoking a piece of wisdom imparted to him as a 14-year-old by the legendary French entertainer Maurice Chevalier. "He was a very gentle monsieur," Hallyday remembered of the older man. "He gave me a lot of advice. He asked me to sing him a few songs and he said to me, 'Look, I don't know if you're going to be a great singer or not, but you must always be careful with your entrance on stage and your exit. In the middle, you do what you can. You try to sing'."

**HIS 1972 SHOW** Johnny Circus was staged in a big top, and by 1979 he had gone hi-tech, premiering the sci-fi spectacular *L'Ange Aux Yeux De Laser* and donning a silver spacesuit with goggles which shot lasers at audiences. A quarter of a million punters paid for the privilege of being blasted by Hallyday on this tour. Things were ramped up to ridiculous levels in the 80s, as he finally laid to rest the rock'n'roll pin-up and recreated himself in the image of Kiss and Alice Cooper. Fantasmhallyday, which was unveiled at the Palais des Sports in Paris, was a full-on pantomime replete with a cast of 80 dressed as zombies and vampires. This was only eclipsed by his 2000 show, 100% Johnny: Live à la Tour Eiffel, when Hallyday appeared in a huge silver sphere before a crowd of half a million.

During 50-plus tours, he played to an estimated 28 million people in all, often arriving on stage in flames or plumes of smoke, or being winched down from a helicopter. But away from the spotlight and the adulation of his acolytes, Hallyday was tormented in his private life. He married five times, including twice to Adeline Blondieau (from 1990 to 1992, and 1994 to 1995), was open about his battle against depression, attempted suicide and became variously addicted to cocaine, opium, cannabis and alcohol – all dependencies which he attributed to an unhappy childhood after being abandoned by his parents. "For a long time, I couldn't get out of bed in the morning without cocaine," he admitted in 1998. "I have done some self-analysis. And

## ESSENTIAL HALLYDAY

### OUR TOP THREE PICKS

#### VIENS DANSER LE TWIST



1961

From the album of the same name (which also features *High School Confidential*),

*Viens Danser Le Twist* is Hallyday's exuberant take on Chubby Checker's global hit. How could the French record-buying public resist his overtures for them to "tweest"? Mr Checker would surely have approved.

#### CELUI QUE TU PRÉFÈRES

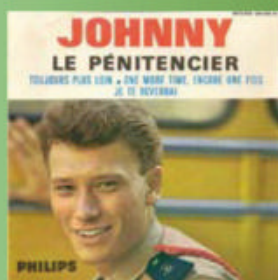


1964

Hallyday creditably channels his touchstone Elvis Presley on this version of the

King's 1957 hit *Teddy Bear* from the Gallic pretender's 1964 collection *Johnny, Reviens! Les Rocks Les Plus Terribles*, though alters the lyric from "Let me be your teddy bear" to "Let me be the one you prefer". The album also includes some good rockin' covers of *Johnny B. Goode*, *Roll Over Beethoven*, *Carole* and *Long Tall Sally*.

#### LE PÉNITENCIER



Like Elvis,

Hallyday was stationed in West Germany during his military service. While on leave, he went

into the studio to lay down what is arguably his finest moment on record, a revision of *House Of The Rising Sun*, the American folk song popularised months earlier by The Animals. While the original concerns a brothel, French songwriter Hugues Aufray relocates Hallyday's narrative to a penitentiary, from where the protagonist implores his mother's forgiveness.

I can see that my early days knocked me off course. My fierce desire for a family, but my repeated failure to keep one, it all stems from that."

There were also problems with the taxman (prompting his exile from France to Switzerland), a legal battle with Universal over the control of his masters (which he lost) and an accusation of rape by a former employee (though charges were never filed). Unsurprisingly, given his voracious appetite for illicit substances, Hallyday's health declined considerably in the noughties, although rumours of his demise on the operating table while receiving treatment for a slipped disc in 2009 were wide of the mark. It turned out that he was, in fact, placed in a medically-induced coma after contracting an infection. While Hallyday saw the funny side – "The first time I died I didn't like it, so I came back," he quipped – his fans displayed less levity, with one attacking the surgeon who carried out the procedure. He successfully fought colon cancer, but in 2017, Hallyday succumbed to lung cancer at the age of 74.

A nation mourned and Paris ground to a halt, with nearly a million people lining the Champs-Élysées to bid farewell as his body was brought to the Madeleine Church. French President Emmanuel Macron was among those to pay glowing tribute, declaring that Hallyday "transcended generations and is etched in the memory of the French people". Macron was joined at the funeral by two of his predecessors, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande. Mick Jones, who served alongside Hallyday in The Blackburds, wrote on social media, "Johnny, my dear friend and inspiration throughout the years. I will miss you terribly. You will live on in my everlasting memories."

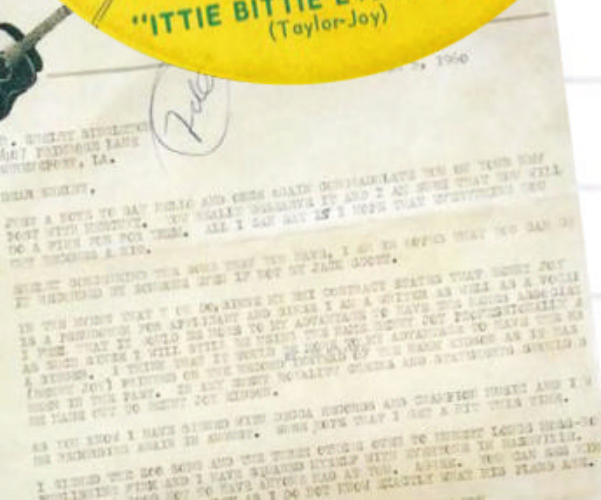
*Le Figaro* columnist Alexis Brezet summed up Hallyday's legacy thus: "His public was France. The France of the bad boys and girls of good families; of children and grandparents; of commies and liberals, Parisians and provincials, well-heeled bohemians and the proletariat. The France of bar-tabs and cybercafes, old-style dancehalls and the temples of techno." A whole country, Brezet continued, saw itself in Hallyday, "the good sides and the bad, the enthusiasms and the depressions, the falls from grace and the redemptions".

Outside France, many were sufficiently moved by the outpouring of grief on his passing to investigate the phenomenon who gave rock'n'roll a French accent. ★





The Nasty Rockabilly compilation was where it all started for Benny Joy collector Bassam Hasanat



# Benny Joy

Devoted fans show us their collections and memorabilia



**NAME** Bassam Hasanat

**LOCATION** Hoofddorp, the Netherlands

**When did you first become a Superfan of Benny and what was it that initially drew you to him?**

I was playing the *Nasty Rockabilly* compilation, which features *Spin The Bottle* and *Wild, Wild Lover*. Then I found the Dutch CD *Rockin' And Rollin' With Benny Joy* and was captivated by *Dark Angel*, *Nosey, Nosey*, *Neighbors* and *Gossip, Gossip*. He sounded like Elvis, then Johnny Cash, then Buddy Holly... Who was this guy? Then I found out he was making demos and was hoping to get those to the rock royalty. What's more, he refused to sign to Sun Records, because he didn't want to leave his beloved Florida.

**Describe your collection for us...**

I now have 17 45s and both of the Dutch compilation albums on vinyl. I also have some Norton Records promo LPs, as well as the Italian Broadway album from July 1959, *Festival of American Song*, which was released because of the European tour that Buck Ram had arranged. In addition, I have a signed letter that

he wrote to Shelby Singleton in 1960 on his own personal stationery.

**What is your favourite item?**

I have two precious items. Firstly, there's the single *Ittie Bittie Everything*, which Benny signed in October 1959 for a fan. Also, I have an original tour poster from 1958 or 1959. It was found in northern Italy by a movie poster collector. He didn't know much about Benny, so I bought it for a reasonable price.

**How much have you spent so far on your collection?**

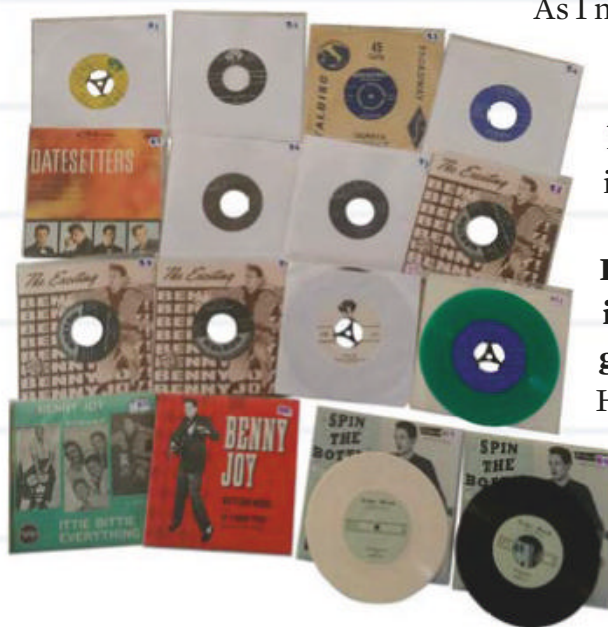
Considering I was lucky with the three original Ram label singles, in total it's close to 1,000 Euros.

**What's your fondest memory of Benny Joy as a fan?**

As I never met him, the closest I can get is holding the signed single. Knowing he held that in his hands is wonderful.

**Is there one Holy Grail item you would love to get your hands on?**

His two-tone signature guitar, with his name on it. I wonder where it is – and if there's only one of them...



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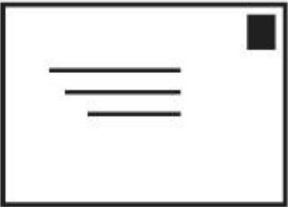
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# The Man With The Golden Voice

**His was the velveteen voice behind three of the greatest movie songs of the 60s – From Russia With Love, Born Free and On Days Like These. To mark what would have been his 90th birthday, Vintage Rock talks Matt Monro with his daughter Michele.**

WORDS BY STEVE O'BRIEN

**"If I had to choose three of the finest male vocalists in the singing business," Frank Sinatra once said, "Matt Monro would be one of them."**

His pitch was right on the nose; his word enunciations letter-perfect; his understanding of a song thorough."

As tributes go, certainly if you're in the singing game, it doesn't get any better than that. Sometimes known as 'the singer's singer', and at other times as 'the man with the golden voice', Matt Monro was one of the biggest recording stars of the 1960s, a man who, in 1961, was named *Billboard* magazine's Top International Act and who, in 1964, was the face of Britain in the Eurovision Song Contest. One of his most famous numbers, *Born Free*, even scooped an Oscar. As easy listening artists went in the 1960s, there were few more famous and more loved than Matt Monro.

Like Sinatra, Monro's music and classy, perma-tuxedoed image were far removed from his humble, working-class beginnings. It's not for nothing that his other nickname, the one he was rather less proud of, was 'the singing bus driver' on account of the rather humdrum job he had before becoming a global star. Even his name was

a showbiz sham. Before he was the suited and booted Matt Monro with the honeyed voice and suave demeanour he was plain Terry Parsons from Shoreditch, and from a family that, his daughter Michele tells us, were "very, very poor". The moniker, incidentally, came from a combination of the first journalist to write about him, Matt White, and Munro Atwell, the father of the jazz pianist Winifred Atwell, who'd secured him his first recording gig.

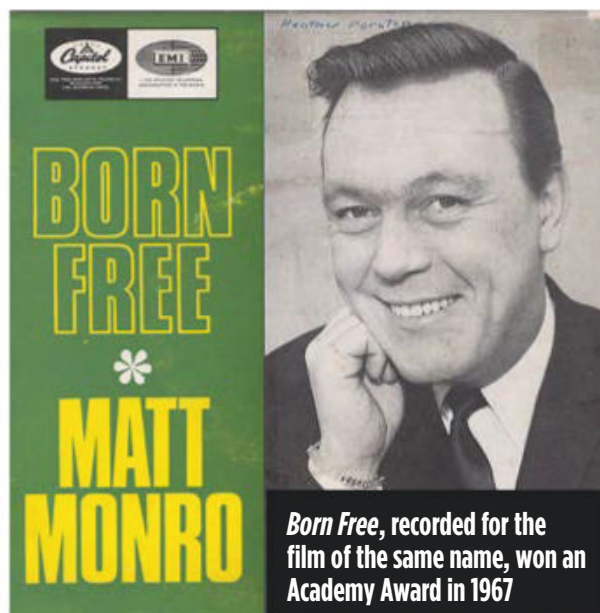
"Dad was one of five children, and his father died when he was only three, so his mother struggled to clothe, feed and house

five children," Michele tells *Vintage Rock*. "They had no possessions as such. And dad went to, well, I lost count after five schools. It was a very displaced childhood."

Born in 1930, Terry Parsons entered his teenage years while the Second World War raged. And like many kids who are surrounded by chaos and terror, he sought solace and escape through the transistor radio, where he'd soak up the pacifying voices of Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Perry Como. "He used to listen to Radio Luxembourg and the music he heard took him away from reality," says Michele. "Well, you could dream, couldn't you?"

This December would have been Matt Monro's 90th birthday, had he not been taken from us, far too young, at the age of 54 in 1985. Yet interest in the singer has never been higher. Only this year, his latest CD collection, *Stranger In Paradise: The Lost New York Sessions*, curated by Michele and remastered by her partner Richard Moore, went Top 10, while Michele regularly plays to packed out theatres – well, before social distancing rules made capacity-crowds a no-no – to talk about her late dad.

When Michele performs her talks, they're usually peppered with weighty name







Frank Sinatra rated Matt Monro among  
his top three vocalists in the business



# “A WONDERLAND OF IMAGINATION”

The most common question Michele Monro gets, whenever she talks about her dad, is which song of his she's most fond of. But the answer, she admits, is never easy.

“My response changes all the time depending on my mood,” she says. “To me, my father's songs are like close intimate friends, something I grew up with. Some I fell in love with instantly and some I learnt to love over time, some are passionate, some sad and some are breezy, bright and uplifting. I know them really well; they've seen me through my private nightmares, my highs and lows, my reveries and my demons. They're always there for me whether I want them or not, but invariably they will elevate me to a better place. They take me to a wonderland of imagination and sometimes I can quite easily live there for a while and when reality hits, I'm better for the song I've heard. A song is as changeable as my disposition and that is why my answer varies from day to day.

“Having said that, the movie soundtracks are all very special, significant milestones in dad's life and he never tired of singing them, nor did I ever tire of listening to them. It was a great honour dad being picked to sing the very first Bond song, and not only is it a great tune but it is a fabulous movie and consistently voted in the Top 10 favourite Bond songs. Dad's music has never dated, it has longevity and could have been written last month. Great vocals, great orchestrations and a great producer delivered a unique package, which I think will stay in people's hearts for a long time to come.”



Monro enjoys a well deserved tea break

drops, as Matt Monro brushed shoulders with pretty much everyone of note in the 1950s and 60s. Two of the most stellar names cited are Sir George Martin and Peter Sellers, both of whom, back in 1960, were key to Monro's breakthrough success. Though he had gigged and recorded in the 50s, fame had somehow eluded Monro. It was only when George Martin, then a couple of years away from buddying up with The Beatles, chose him for a gig on a Peter Sellers comedy album titled *Songs For Swingin' Sellers*, that his luck began to change. Martin had written a Sinatra pastiche called *You Keep Me Swingin'* for the Goons star, but when Sellers admitted he was unsure of how to sing it, Martin hired Monro to record a guide vocal. Sellers, impressed by Monro's performance, ditched the original idea and included Monro's version of the song on the record instead. The only downside for the wannabe star was that the vocal was credited to 'Fred Flange' on the album.

Still, Parlophone – and Martin – knew Fred Flange's real identity and swiftly signed the 30-year-old crooner. Within a few months, Matt Monro would have his first UK hit, the lush, swoonsome *Portrait Of My Love*. Produced by

Martin, the record was the first of many that the two would collaborate on.

“They were such good friends,” Michele Monro tells *Vintage Rock*. “They had the same sense of humour. They would literally corpse on the floor in the studio and had this excellent rapport with each other. George respected dad's talent, and likewise with dad. They were kind of in awe of each other's abilities. I mean, George found dad before he found The Beatles and he recognised there was something special there. That relationship carried on throughout dad's life.”

A string of hits followed *Portrait Of My Love*, culminating in the offer, in 1963, to record the theme song for the much-anticipated sequel to the James Bond film *Dr. No*. Unlike every Bond theme that came after, however,

Monro's vocals for *From Russia With Love* aren't in the opening title sequence. Instead, he's heard for the first time on a radio while Bond is smooching by a river, and then again during the end titles.

“I couldn't believe that was all there was, I was terribly upset,” said Monro's wife Mickie, in an interview before she died. “Matt loved the Bond films and was avidly watching the action. He seemed immersed in the movie, so I didn't voice my upset but knew he must have felt disappointed





By 1956, **Monro** was already a prominently featured vocalist with the BBC Show Band



himself. Then, right at the very end at the closing credits, his voice filled the cinema and in the space of seconds I went from feeling decidedly dejected to euphoric.”

*From Russia With Love*, along with another John Barry composition, the soaring *Born Free*, remain Monro’s most beloved, and certainly in his lifetime, requested tracks. Sometimes, however, signature songs can become millstones round the necks of the singers who sing them. But not to Monro, it appears.

“He never got tired of singing them,” says Michele. “He always said, ‘Those songs made me popular and if that’s what people want to hear, I’m happy to oblige’. It got difficult after a few years because the fans who came to see him wanted their favourites, so it was tricky to put new material in a show in case some of them went away disappointed. I mean, I released an album a few years ago and made the mistake of missing out *On Days Like These* [featured in *The Italian Job*]. The backlash I got!”

Though Monro’s song for 1964’s Eurovision Song Contest, *I Love The Little Things*, came second, it was onwards and upwards for the rest of the 60s. The gorgeous *Walk Away* (with lyrics from Don Black) went Top Five in 1964, while his strings-laden take on The Beatles’ *Yesterday* – he was the first person to cover the song – peaked at No.8 in 1965.

As Matt Monro’s career was on the up, apparently so was his home life. Though his first marriage had ended in divorce, he’d met music promoter Renate Schuller (known as Mickie) in the late 50s and they married in 1959, producing two children, daughter Michele and son Matt Jr.

“There was always music in the house,” remembers Michele of her childhood. “Dad would have friends round and they’d rehearse. He had hundreds of tapes sent to him every week from musicians. So they’d



## WHEN GEORGE MARTIN CHOSE MONRO FOR A PETER SELLERS COMEDY ALBUM, HIS LUCK BEGAN TO CHANGE

have several four- to five-hour sessions just listening to tracks, him and [arrangers] Colin Keyes and Johnnie Spence. And then if George Martin came over, if they were going into the studio, they would literally sit down and talk about how many musicians they should have, what the line-up should be, what the feel of the track should be, so that when they went in the studio, everybody would know their job already.”

Monro’s star wattage was so bright in the 1960s that, in 1969, he was even offered a job in a Hollywood movie. *Satan’s Harvest* isn’t a great film by any stretch, a ho-hum South Africa-set adventure co-starring Tippi Hedren, but its director, the former actor and stuntman George Montgomery, was such a fan of Monro’s that he gave him carte blanche on who he played in the movie.

“Dad went, ‘Thanks, but I can’t act,’ and George just said, ‘Oh, don’t worry about that,’” laughs Michele. “So he sent dad the script and told him to pick any role he wanted, and so dad picked the role of this bush pilot, who only had one line in the whole movie – he figured that was a safe bet. But unbeknownst to him, George then rewrote the whole script so that dad’s character was in it throughout. He loved it, though. He loved filming in South Africa, and he loved the camaraderie on set because, as a singer, you’re alone out on stage, so it was a whole different ball game for him. He was very sad when the shoot came to an end.”

By the 1970s, however, Monro’s brand of smooth balladry was sadly going out of fashion and his last chart hit came in





Monro putting on a show at the Grand Hotel Verdala in Malta

1973 with a track called *And You Smiled*, which was essentially the theme to the ITV crime drama *Van Der Valk* (titled *Eye Level* in its instrumental form) with added lyrics.

The 1970s also brought two great tragedies. The deaths of his mother and then, soon after, of his friend and musical arranger Johnnie Spence at the age of just 43, devastated Monro and exacerbated his already excessive drinking.

"Johnny and dad were like brothers," says Michele, "and Johnny dying, it just finished him. It was part of a long series of events that he wasn't happy with in his life."

Much has been made of Monro's supposed alcoholism, but Michele maintains his drinking was, for the most part, heavy, as opposed to out of control.

"He didn't drink in the morning, and he didn't hide bottles," she stresses. "I think it's the difference between an alcoholic and a drunk."

It didn't help that Monro was born with infective hepatitis and was hospitalised for two years, a fact no one bothered to tell him later in life. Suffering jaundice and stomach pains in the late 70s, Monro went to the doctor only to be told his

liver couldn't process alcohol properly. "If he was in a town where there were several theatres and Dave Allen or Tommy Cooper were in a show up the road, those boys would get together afterwards and play cards all night. Drinking sessions could sometimes break out."

The extent of Monro's drinking was something Michele only discovered when she began researching her 2010 biography, *Matt Monro: The Singer's Singer*. The family had been approached by various writers over the years, keen to tell the story of Britain's Sinatra, but Michele says the angle

was always the drinking. "That's all they wanted to focus on," she says, "but I thought, that doesn't define the person."

Not keen to have someone rifling through her dad's letters and contracts ("It would have meant opening the house up to strangers and I didn't fancy that," she says), Michele decided to take the job on herself.

"I did say to my mum, 'I'm not writing a fairytale,

it has to be warts and all'. I interviewed over 200 people, and all his musical directors and asked, well what was he like, was he ever drunk, was he ever not able to perform properly? And I couldn't get anything negative, they were all, no, it was never like that."

Michele says her dad gave up drinking completely in 1980. After suffering a fit, he was told by a doctor, "You can either give up alcohol or you're going to kill yourself."

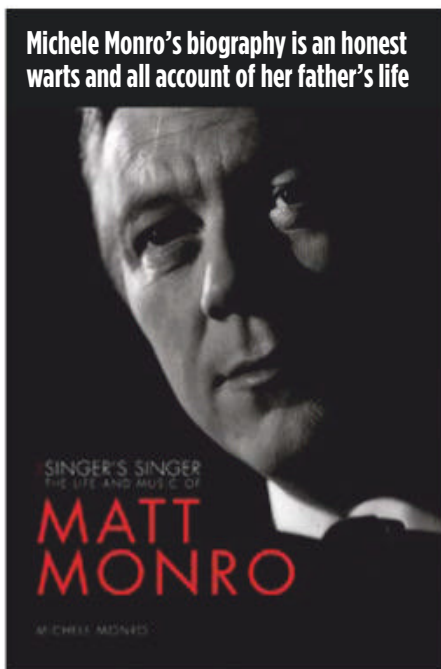
"He gave up overnight," she says, proudly. "He never went to any AA meetings, never ever got tempted, even though we had a full bar in the house for his friends. If he was at the pub, he'd just have a tonic water."

Sadly, the damage done to his liver caught up with him and, in late 1984, while performing in Australia, he was diagnosed with cancer. He was put on a waiting list for a transplant, but though a donor was found and an operation started, it was soon discovered that the cancer had spread.

While on his deathbed, Monro received a get-well telegram that read "From one boy singer to another". It was signed 'Frank Sinatra'. He died a day later. If, as Dean Martin famously said, "It's Frank's world, we just live in it", it's clear there was always a special place in it for Matt Monro. ★

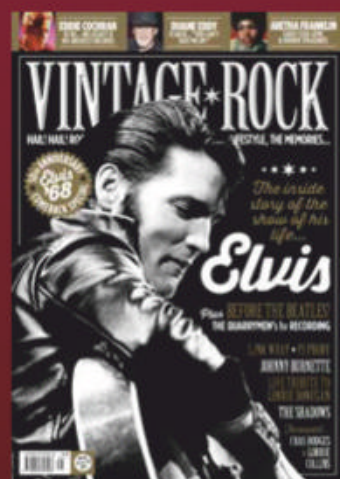
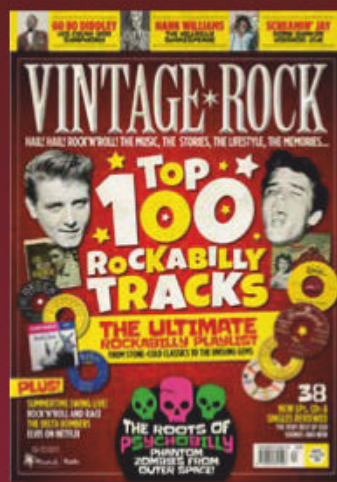
## WHILE ON HIS DEATHBED, MONRO RECEIVED A GET-WELL TELEGRAM. IT WAS SIGNED 'FRANK SINATRA'.

Michele Monro's biography is an honest warts and all account of her father's life





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# Singles & EP Reviews

★★★★★ EXCELLENT  
★★★★★ VERY GOOD  
★★★★ AVERAGE  
★★★ PATCHY  
★ POOR

**More thrilling new sounds and vintage reissues to fatten up your singles collection, including a pair of rockin' Christmas releases and a double A-side paying tribute to the Spanish double-bass ace Carlos Slap**

REVIEWS BY CRAIG BRACKENRIDGE



## Milton Delugg HOORAY FOR SANTA CLAUS MODERN HARMONIC

★★★★

Here's a slice of Christmas cheer courtesy of the label behind the soundtrack releases from youthsplottation flicks such as *Date Bait* and *High School Caesar*. *Santa Claus Conquers The Martians* was a gloriously inept 1964 B-movie and this martian green vinyl 7" features the theme song delivered by Milton Delugg and the Little Eskimos. It's a swingin' affair that sounds as if this recording was where the majority of the film's budget went. The Fleshtones offer up their version of the title track on the B-side and a DVD of the film itself is included.



## The Hi-Jivers KNEE HIGH & RISIN' WILD RECORDS

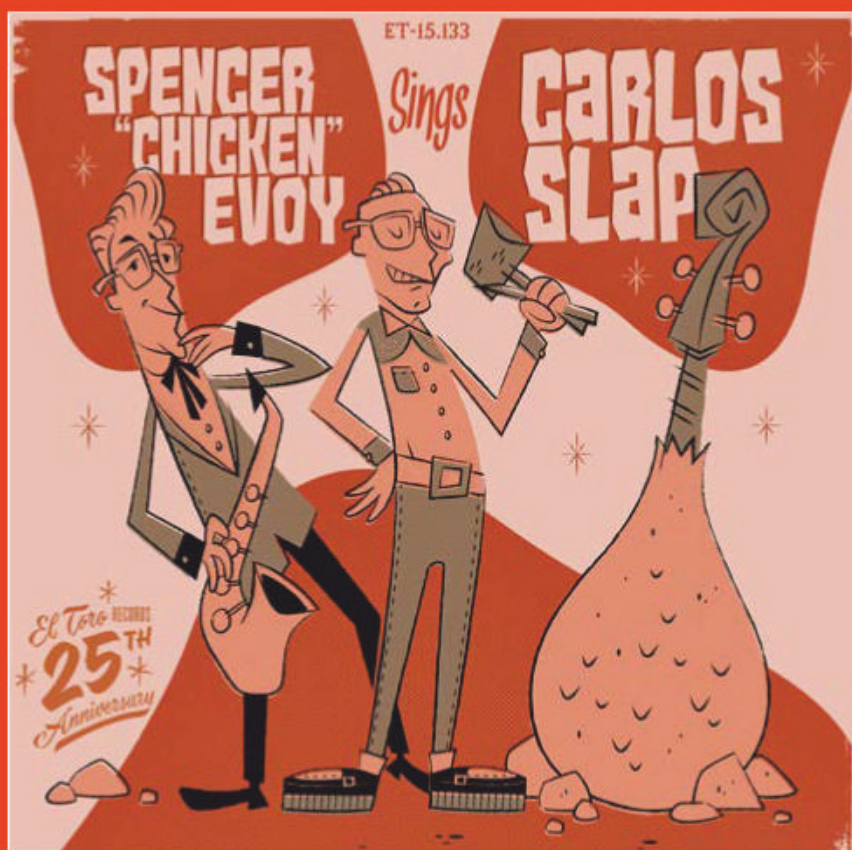
★★★★★

Tipping a respectful hat to the roots of rock'n'roll, The Hi-Jivers forge ahead with their brand of bluesy rockin' – this two-track single is their debut on vinyl. Both original songs showcase Dawna Zahn's powerful, gritty vocals as guitarist Austin John slides wildly alongside her, with the rhythm section keeping it tight. The lead track is swampy R&B heaven, while *Something's Gotta Shake* moves things in a slightly sleazier direction. It's a hard job to sound both authentic and original, but this band seem to manage it with ease.



## Gordon Doel/Spencer "Chicken" Evoy SINGS CARLOS SLAP EL TORO ★★★★★

El Toro Records celebrate their 25th anniversary with this pair of 7" releases which pay tribute to the songs of Spanish double bass favourite Carlos Slap. Last year, El Toro had Marcel Bontempi interpret two songs by Carlos on a seven-inch and they've enlisted a couple of other esteemed vocalists for this project. Gordon Doel from Hampshire hillbillies The Doel Brothers tackles two Slap smashers on his single, starting off with the jazz-tinged rocker *I'm Not Alone* followed by the steel guitar-led country



swinger *I Feel The Storm*. The second single features Canadian tenor sax honker Spencer Evoy from MFC Chicken in top form. He brings his powerful vocals to the sleazy south of the border anthem *Down To Mexico*, then transforms *Monkey Shotgun* into a breathless organ-powered garage workout. On their own, each of these are quality singles but together they deliver a dynamite package celebrating a landmark year for this vibrant Spanish record label.





**The Rotten Rockers**  
**ITALIAN TEDS**  
ROCKIN' FIFI

★★★★

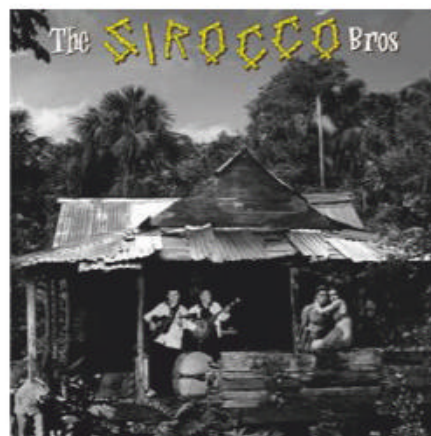
The Italian Teds are on the march and the Rotten Rockers are leading from the front with this four-track collection of their own crepe-soled compositions. It's single-minded Teddy boy rock'n'roll all the way from a band who have genuinely embraced the lifestyle – the title track is a real rebel-rouser with an unsettling edge. *It's Weekend* and *Teddy Boy Pride* both have more of a country feel, but *Death Of The Guilty* is the standout cut as they return to darker territory on a hard-driving, guitar-led slice of evil rockin'.



**Danzig**  
**ALWAYS ON MY MIND**  
CLEOPATRA

★★

Fair play to Glenn Danzig for respectfully tackling some of the King's back catalogue in the full knowledge that critics will be rubbing their hands with glee. Danzig's take on *Always On My Mind* features a minimal beat way in the background, with atmospheric guitar taking the lead as he offers a respectful, subdued vocal showing. His version of *Loving Arms* on the B-side is similar in tone, and while this won't do much for Elvis fans, Danzig acolytes will lap up the five vinyl editions in black, leopard print, pink, purple and 'starburst'.



**The Sirocco Bros**  
**JUNGLE STOMP**  
ROLLIN RECORDS

★★★★

This mysterious duo have a knack for creating limited-edition vinyl releases that get collectors' noses twitching whenever they set free another slab of wax. With their trademark blend of backwoods blues and spooky rockabilly, *Jungle Stomp* arrives with an elephant's wail and a Tarzan yell before kicking up the dust with some driving boogie. Also on offer is *Haunted Guitar*, which seems to waft from the speakers like a dense mountain fog. Once again, the Sirocco Bros leave you thoroughly rocked but slightly uneasy at the same time.



**Howlin' Ramblers**  
**I'M A HOBO**  
SLEAZY

★★★★

Straight-up, hard rockin' blues rockabilly is what you would expect from this Spanish quintet, and their latest single brings exactly that. All three tracks are cherry-picked from their latest, CD-only, album *Men With Broken Hearts*, so this is an ideal way to sample them on vinyl. *Let's Get Out* is the wildest offering, with its blistering pace and cavalry-charge harmonica blowing, but the country-tinged title track and pedal-to-the-metal *Eighteen Wheeler* are no slouches either. Bristling with energy and a little brutality.



**Roy Brown/Lloyd Price**  
**BOOGIE AT MIDNIGHT**  
ACE

★★★★

Ace Records continue to celebrate their 45th anniversary with a series of 45s that mine their back catalogue for rockin' nuggets. Roy Brown's frantic floor-pounder *Boogie At Midnight* kicks things off and this 'Take 1' version sounds wilder than the track that eventually made it out on the DeLuxe label way back in 1949. Lloyd Price gets an alternate version of his 1952 track *Lawdy Miss Clawdy* on the B-side and the change is less distinct but clearly noticeable if you spin it after the original. Another highly collectable 45.



**Johnny Hallyday**  
**KILI WATCH**  
L.M.L.R

★★★★

Here's a Euro-smash if ever there was one, as some of the Spanish label releases from France's godfather of rock'n'roll get a very collectable reissue in five colours, limited to 100 copies of each hue. *Kili Watch* appeared in 1960 on the Madrid label Hispavox and it features the slightly demented title track alongside versions of *Sweet Nothin's*, *Cathy's Clown* and his own *Oui J'ai*. While you're in the mood for this rockin' cultural cocktail, Johnny's 1961 EP *Pony Time* also gets a similar short-run multi-coloured release.



**The Volcanics**  
**CHRISTMAS WASSAILING**  
HI-TIDE

★★★★

Christmas was never meant to be twang-free and The Volcanics have released this green-vinyl EP of festive favourites that will fill your home with echoing guitar as you sip eggnog from your favourite tiki glass. These Californian beach bums turn seasonal standards such as *Hark, The Herald Angels Sing*, *Here We Come A-Wassailing* and *Tidings Of Comfort And Joy* into wave-chasing whoppers alongside a little change of pace on *The Snowman Walk*. As a bonus, the first 100 copies include an exclusive Christmas card signed by the band.



**X Ray Cat Trio & Harriet Hyde**  
**BUBBLEGUM**  
BUZZARDS CLAW

★★★★★

The defiantly original Leeds combo featured guest vocalist Harriet Hyde on their recent album *Love, Blood & Monsters*, and here they take things further with a full EP together. All four tracks reek of authentic 1950s teen pop with a twisted edge to the whole thing. The title track makes the rowdiest racket, but across *Only One*, *Chainsmoke* and *Loser* there is a similar haunting doo-wop feel that raises the goosebumps. These are all juvenile delinquent love songs for a new generation delivered in glorious pink vinyl only.

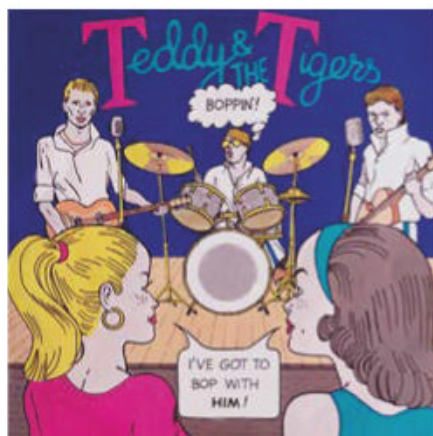


# Vinyl LP Reviews



**A rockin' mini-album from Red Hot Riot, a slice of Finnish rockabilly, a pair of Elvis releases and a limited edition Batmobile 10-inch**

REVIEWS BY CRAIG BRACKENRIDGE

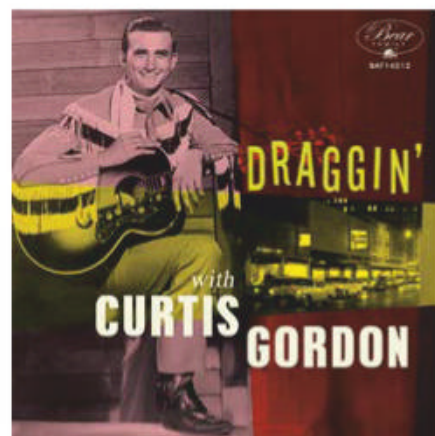


## Teddy & The Tigers

**BOPPIN' BLUE LIGHT**

★★★★★

Teddy & The Tigers took Finnish rockabilly to dizzying heights with three top-selling albums in rapid succession – and this exquisitely packaged 10" comes in a gatefold sleeve and includes an exact copy of their debut 7" EP from 1977. Amongst the covers of classic rockers such as *Nervous Breakdown*, *Jeanie Jeanie Jeanie* and *Rock Around With Ollie Vee* are the band's own songs such as *Boppin'* and *Tiger Street*. If you're not steeped in the history of Finnish music, this is a fascinating peek into a homegrown rockin' scene.



## Curtis Gordon

**DRAGGIN' WITH... BEAR FAMILY**

★★★★

This is the first time both versions of Gordon's rockabilly classic have appeared together on one album. Bear Family have collected together 10 of his Mercury titles, alongside two 1959 recordings for Dollie Records, and released them in a fantastic 10" vinyl package, which contains a booklet of rare photos plus a potted history of the man himself. Joining stompers such as *Mobile*, *Alabama* and *Rock, Roll, Jump And Jive* is the honky-tonk ballad *Blue Lifetime*. It's an essential addition to the collection of any follower of mid-50s rock'n'roll.

# RED HOT RIOT



## HOPELESS ROMANTIC

## Red Hot Riot

**HOPELESS ROMANTIC WESTERN STAR**

★★★★

At the end of last year, *Vintage Rock* highlighted Red Hot Riot as ones to watch in 2020, but nobody could have predicted the absolute desolation of the live music industry that was to follow. The band's healthy schedule of gigs evaporated almost overnight, but thankfully their time spent in the bowels of the Western Star studios has proved fruitful and this six-track 10" mini-album finishes off the strangest of years in fine style. There is no messing around here, just half a dozen original compositions on which the band take the well-established template of rockabilly then add a sprinkling of their own melodic glimmer. It is easy to see how infectious growlers such as *Key To The Lock* and *What's A Boy To Do* could be future classics and, while the musical landscape of 2021 looks a little hazy right now, with bands like Red Hot Riot around the future of British rockabilly looks very bright indeed.





**Batmobile**  
**BIG BAT**  
**MUSIC ON VINYL**

★★★★★

If you missed out on Batmobile's recent RSD single, here's a chance to savour their big band, Big Bat sound over six new tracks on a transparent yellow vinyl 10". With the nine-piece Bosco Horns on board, it takes psychobilly into widescreen territory, and their old favourite *Transylvanian Express* sounds like a twisted Bond theme from a parallel universe. Even the slow and sleazy *Man With The Shovel* is given a film noir makeover. Tracking this down still requires some sense of urgency, as it comes individually numbered and limited to just 1,500 copies.



**Slowey & The Boats**  
**MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM...**  
**VOL. 1&2**

HI-TIDE

★★★

If you're planning a smooth, Hawaiian-inspired festive gathering, this collection of mellow Christmas classics is the only soundtrack you'll need. Landing on ruby red vinyl, it tackles a dozen gentle blasts of Noel favourites and dips them in a dreamy steel-guitar haze. Half of these songs appeared on CD back in 2017, but the remainder are new. An album that will sit comfortably alongside JD McPherson's *Socks* in any household that's turned its back on the usual Christmas favourites that dominate at this time of year.



**The Holloway Echoes**  
**SHIVERING SANDS**  
**WESTERN STAR**

★★★★★

Although the doubters may claim there's nothing new in rock'n'roll, The Holloway Echoes suggest otherwise. Their unique sound comes straight from the Zi's Coffee Bar via Chas & Dave, with a good portion of humorous lyrical content thrown in. After two full albums in just over a year, the quality continues on this pink 10". Only two tracks make the jump to vinyl from their second full-length release, *Stack 'Em Up*, and the six new recordings tell their own lurid tale of Teds, tattooists, pirate radio stations and Screaming Lord Sutch.



**Elvis Presley**  
**EASY COME, EASY GO**  
**FTD**

★★★

The Follow That Dream label turns its attention to Elvis' 1967 deep sea diving and yoga movie *Easy Come, Easy Go* and this previously measly soundtrack gets a massive upgrade. Starting with the original six-song EP, they've added a mammoth 17 tracks on this two-disc set. The extra material includes two bonus songs, *Come What May* and *Fools Fall In Love*, along with stacks of alternate takes and movie masters. Also present are tracks such as *She's A Machine* and *Leave My Woman Alone*, which were recorded for the film but never used.



**Various Artists**  
**HEADIN' FOR THE**  
**CHRISTMAS BALL**  
**BEAR FAMILY**

★★★★★

The options for a more sophisticated Christmas continue with this tasteful collection on red vinyl with a 1950s greetings card tucked inside. The Surfers, The Andrews Sisters, Dinah Washington and Johnny Otis are just some of the heavy hitters on this set of rarities from 1947-1962. While comedian Jerry Lewis adds a touch of humour with his tone deaf rendition of *I've Had A Very Merry Christmas*, the main theme is a type of swingin' smoothness that will melt the resolve of even the most hardened humbugs.



**Wanda Jackson**  
**I REMEMBER ELVIS**  
**CLEOPATRA**

★★★

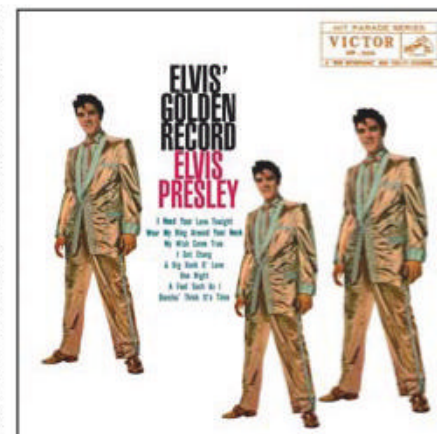
This album, produced by Danny B. Harvey, has seen the light of day in many configurations since its original CD release, but Cleopatra have topped them all with this good-looking picture disc. Recorded in California in 2005, the album features an interview with Wanda, discussing personal memories of Elvis, along with new recordings of Presley classics with a crack band of musicians including Harvey on guitar and Blondie drummer Clem Burke. *The Queen Of Rockabilly Salutes The King Of Rock N' Roll* contains the same material.



**Sam Cooke**  
**AT THE COPA**  
**UMC**

★★★

Although this album has not had a decent vinyl reissue since the late 1980s, UMC have given it a polish-up and brought it back to life in a solidly remastered 12" form. Recorded over two nights at New York's Copacabana Club in 1964, it captures Cooke on lively form in front of an audience that surely contained a 'wise guy' or two. It certainly swings as you would expect in this venue but it all sounds fairly pedestrian, with only *Twistin' The Night Away* really shaking off the cobwebs, alongside a hip-rolling version of *Tennessee Waltz*.



**Elvis Presley**  
**ELVIS' GOLDEN RECORD**  
**VPI**

★★★

As collectors' wallets get a regular battering and record shelves creak under the weight of Elvis reissues there's always room for one more – especially if it looks as good as this. VPI Records deliver a delicious slice of 10" vinyl in translucent, half-and-half split opaque gold and violet vinyl, reproducing this Japan-only release from 1960. The tracks are simply eight of the 10 standards from the *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't be Wrong* album, but with only 500 available and the original Japanese sleeve notes left intact, how can you resist?



# CD Album Reviews



**Elvis, Aretha and Shakin' Stevens receive the boxset treatment, Johnny Cash gets an orchestral makeover and much more...**

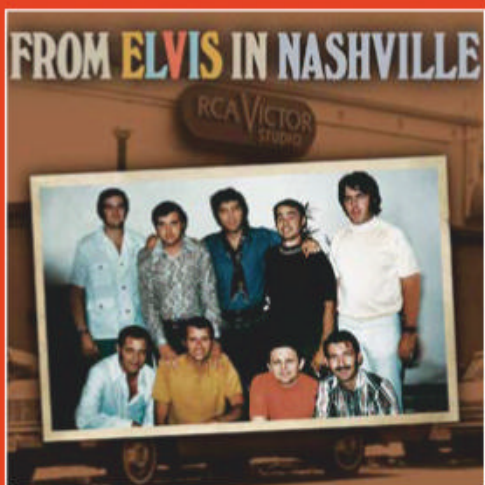
REVIEWS BY STEVE HARNELL, JOHN HOWARD  
& DOUGLAS McPHERSON

## Elvis Presley FROM ELVIS IN NASHVILLE SONY ★★★★★

Long-awaited by fans, Elvis' mythical marathon recording sessions from 1970 with the Nashville Cats finally get an official release in their entirety. *Elvis In Nashville* is the definitive document of these sessions, a boxset that gets to the nitty gritty of the assembled players' musicality – all the attendant overdubs that appeared on any subsequent studio masters have been stripped back here. This is Elvis and the Cats in the raw. As if to showcase their chops, an opening instrumental jam on *Mystery Train* is stunning. The sessions have a swaggering charm to them – locker room banter and all – everyone brings their A-game. Presley sounds imperious on the bare bones covers of *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me* and *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, while the tongue-in-cheek *I Was Born About Ten Thousand Years Ago* rumbles beautifully. Rockier cuts including *I Washed My Hands In Muddy Water* and *Patch It Up* also impress. Alternate takes provide interesting fuller context as arrangements coalesce into their final forms, there's even a fine sprint through *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On*. However, the additional unreleased material often merely serves to prove the band and Elvis hit the

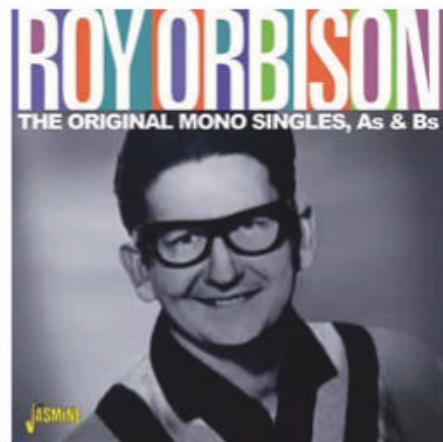
ground running throughout, with slight tweaks in tempo and vibe pulled off on the fly. The finest session players the US had to offer and Presley in full flight were a formidable dream team that should have been paired up more often.

**Steve Harnell**



## Little Richard THE SECOND COMING JASMINE ★★★

On paper, the signs for *The Second Coming* all boded well. Joining iconic drummer Earl Palmer were the cream of 70s session musicians and there's even the partial reunion with songwriter Robert 'Bumps' Blackwell. But despite Little Richard's typically bravura vocal performances, much of this album fails to catch fire. You can't fault the band on the thumping *Mockingbird Sally*, but Richard's vocals seem garbled. *Second Line* is a so-so dance instruction song and the wah-wah guitar drenched *Nuki Suki* is thinly sketched 70s funk. On the plus side, the studio band are smoking on *Prophet Of Peace* and stretch out languorously on seven-minute instrumental closer *Sanctified, Satisfied Toe-Tapper*. **SH**



## Roy Orbison THE ORIGINAL MONO SINGLES, As & Bs JASMINE ★★★★★

Returning to the sonic purity of the original releases, these mono mixes of The Big O's first 17 singles pack a bigger punch than many of the overdubbed stereo versions that followed in their wake. Rounding up Orbison's 7" work on Je-Wel, Sun, RCA Victor and Monument, his vocals are placed front and centre. You can hear Orbison grow in stature from the early lip-curling swagger of *Go! Go! Go!* and growling *Mama* to heart-rending ballads such as the vibrato-laden *Only The Lonely* and *Crying*. **SH**



## Various Artists THIS IS FAME 1964-1968 FAME ★★★★★

Packed with stellar tunes, *This Is Fame* rounds up 24 gutsy soul cuts from the Muscle Shoals studio. James Barnett's *It Tears Me Up* drips with emotion and there's a Booker T. & The M.G.'s-like funky bounce to Clarence Carter's *She Ain't Gonna Do Right*. Arthur Conley provides a Northern Soul floorfiller on *I Can't Stop (No, No, No)* and there are Otis Redding levels of passion to Otis Clay's *That Kind Of Lovin'*. Recently uncovered tracks such as Ben & Spence's *Long Ago* suggest Fame's unheard stash is far from exhausted, too. **SH**



## Shakin' Stevens

### SINGLED OUT/FIRE IN THE BLOOD

BMG

★★★★★/★★★★★

During the 80s, Shakin' Stevens was a one-man hit factory. The denim-clad singer pumped out so many UK chart entries – more than any other artist in any genre that decade – that two thirds of the 54 songs gathered on the career-spanning 3CD collection *Singled Out* were bona fide smashes. It's unlikely that anyone who turned on a radio in the 80s won't be familiar with most of them, including the No.1s *This Ole House*, *Green Door*, *Oh Julie* and *Merry Christmas Everyone*. The songs still rock thanks to a timeless energy and shameless feel-good positivity – there was never anything dark or difficult about Shaky.

However, even such a multitude of hits is only the tip of Stevens' recording career, as evidenced by the massive 19CD book pack, *Fire In The Blood*, which includes all 13 of his solo albums in their original format, plus a stack of B-sides, stray singles and remixes not included on the original long-players, and a couple of previously unreleased live albums to boot. And even that's only part of the story, as six earlier albums by Shakin' Stevens and the

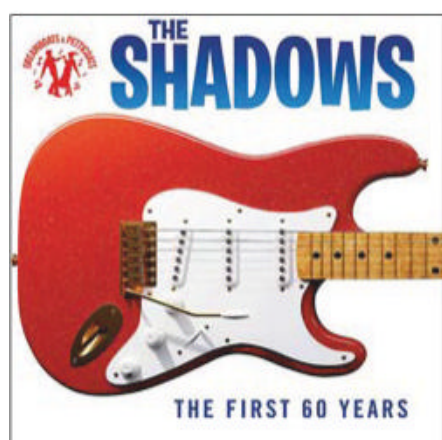
Sunsets aren't included. Shaky's eponymous first solo LP barely saw the light of day in 1978, due to the collapse of his record company, Track. Its inclusion here is a revelation. Musically and vocally raw and impassioned, it's the work of an electrifying rock'n'roller. The gasped and screamed climax to *Such A Night* should carry an X-certificate when compared with his later, more family-friendly work. His relaunch album on Epic, *Take One!*, was tamer and had a country edge, but included the hit cover of *Hot Dog* that set him on a course to chart domination.

Shaky's superpower was his smooth, versatile voice. The French accordion-laced ballad *Give Me Your Heart Tonight* was very different to the drum machine

pop of *Cry Just A Little Bit*, but Stevens imbued everything he touched with the same warm, personable charm.

He undoubtedly owned the magic formula for catchy, pop-slanted rock'n'roll, but after a 16-year absence from the recording studio, his rock-edged 2006 album *Now Listen* and 2016's acclaimed Americana-styled *Echoes Of Our Times* showed a startlingly different side to him.

A live disc, recorded in 2019, proves how Shaky has married his new material to rootsy updates of his old favourites. A bluesy, harmonica-driven *Green Door* is a highlight. Better, though, is a live set for the BBC in 1980 that establishes Shaky as one of the most vibrant, pure rock'n'roll stars ever. **Douglas McPherson**



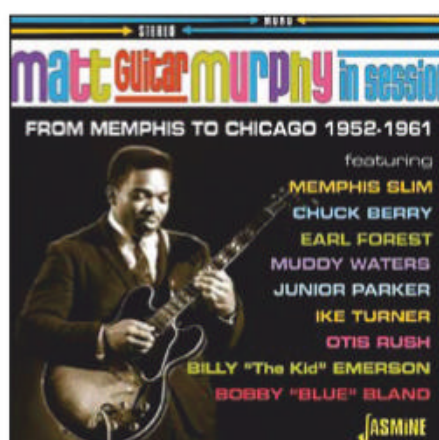
## The Shadows

### THE FIRST 60 YEARS

DECCA

★★★★★

Compiled by the band to mark their 60th anniversary, you can't really quibble at the wide-ranging tracklisting here. Pinballing across eras, dips into the work of The Police, Dire Straits and Procol Harum are safe MOR bets, but the band shine brightest on classics such as *Apache*, *FBI* and *Kon-Tiki*. Their melodic sense on *Foot Tapper* is a joy, while *Man Of Mystery* and *The Rise And Fall Of Flingel Bunt* retain a transportive edge. We'll even forgive the Shads delving into 80s synth-rock with *Crockett's Theme* from *Miami Vice*. **SH**



## Matt 'Guitar' Murphy

### IN SESSION – FROM MEMPHIS TO CHICAGO 1952-1961

JASMINE

★★★★★

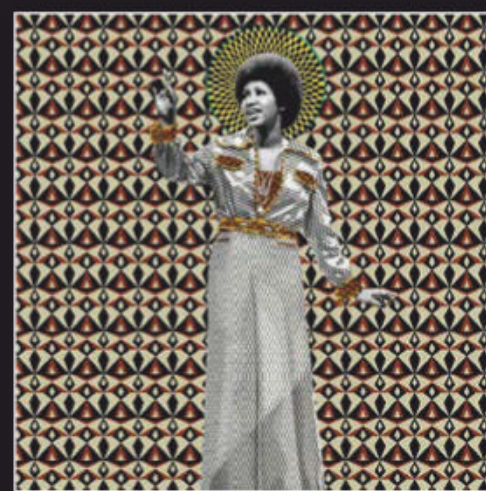
Murphy may have found fame as a member of the Blues Brothers Band but that was only after he notched up countless sessions with the likes of Junior Parker, Memphis Slim, Otis Rush, Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters. Murphy's deft style sees him playing the supporting role – he shows delicacy on Slim's *Little Piece Of Mind*, Berry's *Driftin' Blues* and the slinky funk of Waters' *Messin' With The Man*; a guitar player more interested in serving the song than stealing the limelight from any frontman. **SH**

## Aretha Franklin

ARETHA  
RHINO

★★★★★

This 81-track 4CD boxset gives the fullest depiction to date of the full narrative arc of The Queen Of Soul's life in music and is the first to span every label in her career. Newly remastered, it's compiled mostly chronologically and kicks off with Aretha's astonishing gospel recordings at her father's church in 1956. Of her earlier material, there's the joyously melodic *Are You Sure*, the delicate jazziness of *Skylark* and Bacharach-esque pop of *Runnin' Out Of Fools* to enjoy. Among a raft of alternate versions of classic cuts, demos, rarities and live tracks is an early work-in-progress run through of *My Kind Of Town* (*Detroit Is*) that really swings plus a slinky first attempt at a jazzy reinvention of *Try A Little Tenderness*. Aretha's Atlantic tenure is showcased with compact mono mixes, and well-chosen live performances include cuts from Filmore West shows that serve as



a reminder of just what a force of nature she was in concert. A dream team duet with Dionne Warwick on *I Say A Little Prayer* oozes class, while a cover of Adele's *Rolling In The Deep* is a later-years highlight. Aretha still knocked it out of the park well into the 2010s. **SH**





## Various Artists

### KUSTOM CULTURE KLASSICS ATOMICAT

★★★★

No fewer than 28 tracks glorifying the cult of the hot rod here on what will surely be the first in a series. There's plenty of roaring engines and skidding tyres from the special effects department and plenty of great music, too, including classics such as *Stick Shift* by the Duals, *Big Green Car* by Jimmy Carroll and Richie Deran's *Girl And A Hot Rod*. Among them are newer recordings from mainly European bands, plus obscurities good enough to be deemed classics. This is the soundtrack of your next party, with nary an old banger in sight. **JH**



## The Dellatones

### ROKSOMNIA WESTERN STAR

★★★★

A second studio album from the Devon-based rock'n'roll trio who make a good living playing covers of classics at club level. This release reveals a secret, though – they're also great at writing their own original material. Opener *Grandma's House*, with its witty lyric, sounds like a hit single, while other songs *If It Ain't Broke*, *Bill & Ben Boogie* and the title track all hit the spot. Lead singer Wendy Wolf also impresses throughout with her powerful vocals. A strong collection from a band with more than one string to their bow. **JH**

## Johnny Cash

### AND THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA SONY

★★★★

Following the similarly iconic likes of Elvis, Aretha, Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison, who've already received the 21st century RPO makeover treatment, it's now Johnny Cash's turn to have the world-renowned orchestra add strings, bells and (penny) whistles to a much-loved back catalogue. Sticking to the previous RPO template, this is once more all about adding nuance to studio originals rather than creating radical reinventions. While up-tempo tracks such as *Man In Black* and *Ring Of Fire* are still primarily driven by the guitar, bass and drums of the original, it's the treatments of the ballads that feel most worthy of this new approach. Cash's sentimental side is well served on *Galway Bay* and the pretty June Carter Cash duet *The Loving Gift*. Meanwhile, there's a widescreen lushness to *I Came To Believe* and latter-period gem *Highwayman* now sparkles even more brightly. The recasting of the Bob Dylan duet version of *Girl From The North Country* that featured on *Nashville Skyline* now boasts an



impressively swelling intro and His Bobness' vocal mistake on the third verse has been fixed. Cash's version of the traditional song *Farther Along* – The Byrds also did a stellar job on the same track – features Duane Eddy, who supplies a rather understated echo-drenched guitar solo. **SH**

## Hayden Thompson

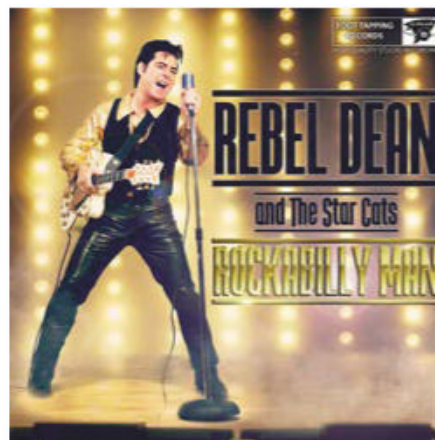
### MISSISSIPPI ROCKABILLY MAN STOMPER TIME

★★★★

Hayden Thompson is one of the last men standing of the original Sun Studio recording artists, and this extensive career overview of a fine singer, songwriter and all-round good guy is well overdue. The 32 tracks include his earliest work cut for Sam Phillips in Memphis and later offerings that prove, as the man himself once quipped, "the body didn't stand up too well, but fortunately, the voice has." He's not wrong, Hayden can still comfortably go from a Johnny Cash deep growl to the high notes that Elvis managed at the start of his career, seemingly with ease. The well-known early tracks are all present and correct, including *Love My Baby*, *Fairlane Rock* and *Blues Blues Blues*. Mid-period country cuts feature prominently, including *Funny How Time Slips Away*, *You Are My Sunshine*, and *Frankie And Johnny*. Bringing the story up to date is the more recent – and highly popular – self-penned *Pretty Little Love Song*. Hayden

gives Presley a run for his money on *My Baby Left Me* and a rocking *Mystery Train*, while *Your Mama Don't Dance*, penned by Loggins and Messina for the duo's eponymous 1972 album, sounds as if it was written for him. He's got a knack for stamping his inimitable style on everything he touches.

**John Howard**



## Rebel Dean And The Star Cats

### ROCKABILLY MAN FOOT TAPPING RECORDS

★★★★

The latest long-player from rockabilly mainstay Rebel Dean features seven self-penned cuts, from the good-time exuberance of the life-affirming title track and *Wild Wild Woman* to the twangy, sax-laced *Cry Baby Cry* and mournful ballad *Lonely Street*. A rocking reboot of *Secret Love* works well and his take on *Pretty Lou* holds its own with Hayden Thompson's version. Dean also poignantly revisits Elvis' last-known studio recording, *He'll Have To Go*, on a consistently fine collection. **SH**



## Various Artists

### THAT'LL FLAT... GIT IT! – VOLUME 35 BEAR FAMILY

★★★★

A second selection of rockabilly and rock'n'roll obscurities and classics culled from the Mercury and Limelight record labels by this admirable German outfit. A single CD digipack with 28-page booklet and 35 tracks over 79 minutes, it hits the ground running with Conway Twitty's pre-fame rocker *Shake It Up*. It's up-tempo all the way, with the remainder including Eddie Bond's *Baby Baby Baby*, Curtis Gordon's *Draggin'* and *The Masked Man (Hi Yo Silver)* by Eddy Bell and the Bel-Aires; all from the very top drawer. **JH**



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# A LIFE IN Rock 'n' Roll

**This issue, Vince joins the 80 club and pays tribute to his dear, departed friend Brian 'Licorice' Locking**



**A**s I was born in 1940, 2020 has been the year in which I celebrated my 80th birthday.

Tommy Steele is the granddaddy

of Britain's original rockers, turning 80 back in 2018, Marty Wilde reached the landmark in 2019, Cliff Richard celebrated the milestone this October and Joe Brown will hopefully be enjoying his 80th next May. And what was it our elders used to say? "Rock'n'roll is not good for you!"

My wife Anette and my family had a big bash planned, with all my rocking mates of today and yesteryear joining me for one heck of a rock'n'roll party. Sadly, it wasn't meant to be, but I still had a great day.

Instead, we ran an online Q&A with many of my new-found social media friends. Some of the varying questions I received would have tested the memory of an 18-year-old, let alone an 80-year-old, so they certainly kept me on my toes. The questions set my memory a mammoth task, and I thought it would be a good idea to answer some in my capacity as a regular *Vintage Rock* contributor. I joined *Vintage Rock* for its third issue six years ago and I've enjoyed contributing to it ever since.

**EDDIE WAS FABULOUS COMPANY AND SOMEONE WHO ALWAYS HAD THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS AT HEART**

**EARLIER THIS YEAR** *Vintage Rock* produced a brilliant special edition dedicated to Eddie Cochran in recognition of the 60th anniversary of his tragic accident and subsequent death on 17 April 1960. It was a poignant occasion for me and I had a special day planned in order to pay homage to an amazing talent, an awesome guy and a very close friend. It was also the day another great talent and good friend, Billy Fury, would have turned 80.

In order to pay my respects to them both, I ordered two wreaths, with the intention of laying one at Billy's statue at Liverpool's Albert Dock early on the morning of 17 April, and then driving to Rowden Hill in Chippenham to lay the other at Eddie's memorial. Unfortunately, the florist tasked with making the wreaths contacted me two weeks prior to the event to say that she couldn't carry out the order due to the pandemic lockdown and subsequent lack of flowers.

Instead, I decided to call upon my good pal and *Vintage Rock* caricaturist Graham "The Hitman" Fowell to conjure up something very special that included both Eddie and Billy. As they were such good pals, I thought it would be fitting to include the wonderful memorial to Eddie on Rowden Hill and, as you can see by the fantastic accompanying caricature, Graham did Eddie and Billy proud.

A photo was posted on Facebook recently of Eddie Cochran and I deep in conversation. This prompted questions at my Q&A as to what we might be discussing. During the early days of the 1960 tour, Eddie was akin to a piece of blotting paper. He'd soak up as much information as he could about where we were going and anything of interest regarding that particular area. "How will we get there? Will all the audiences be the same? What will the weather be like? What's the history of the place?" And so on.

He was fabulous company and someone who always had the well-being of others at heart, especially where tourmate Gene Vincent was concerned. Sadly, there were times when Gene didn't realise that Eddie felt responsible for him, especially regarding his leg, which was a constant issue with Gene in regards to his changing moods. At times, he could be the kindest and most humble person you could ever wish to meet, whereas on other occasions he could be an absolute nightmare and undeserving of any sympathy offered.

Bearing in mind the tour started in January and it was miserable weather, Eddie couldn't get over how green the fields and trees were in England. It was one of these weather-related comments that prompted Eddie to say, "I could easily live here. It's beautiful". I was gobsmacked. I couldn't get over what he was saying. "Why don't you live here then Eddie?" I asked. "You could buy a house here with a month's salary and work on the continent as well. They would love you over there and there's no flying involved, just a couple of hours on a cross-channel ferry." Eddie had already enquired if there were any





*In memory of two amazingly talented and sorely missed pals. Always in my thoughts, Vinnie.*

dates that he would have to fly to on the UK tour. It was obvious Buddy Holly's death in a plane crash was still fresh in his memory, and he'd be thrilled if he never had to fly again. "Without flying? How the hell do you do that?" he asked. I then went on to explain the ferry services between the UK and the continent, plus he could drive to China for a gig if he wanted to.

**EDDIE WAS DEFINITELY** a mum's boy and was always on the phone to her. So much so that his road manager, Hal Carter, was concerned as to how much Eddie was spending on calls. If his mum agreed – and he felt she would – then that would be a great idea.

The early part of the tour was two shows a night for one night only in various towns and cities, but when Larry Parnes saw the demand for the show was proving to be such a success and selling out in numerous theatres, he decided to set up a tour including venues with twice-nightly shows, which would run for six days. Unfortunately, I couldn't do weekly shows as I was appearing in the 1960 Eurovision Song

Contest – the first rock'n'roller to do so. This prompted Larry to leave the post-Eurovision dates vacant, as he expected me to be very busy on the continent. First, I had to win it!

Eddie was curious as to why I couldn't do the extra dates: "What the hell is the Eurovision Song Contest anyway?" he asked. I explained and he thought it was a great idea, and maybe they could do it in the United States as an inter-state competition. He often brought it up in conversation and was gutted when he discovered he couldn't watch my appearance on the show on 4 February 1960 as he'd be in Glasgow for six nights with twice-nightly shows.

The Eurovision contest was even more frustrating for me, as I came last. Yes, the song was rubbish, but it wasn't the song that the judges marked me down on, it was my clothes. Apparently, I was the first male artist since the contest began in 1956 not to have worn an evening suit, dickie bow tie etc, this having been the norm and the rules.

Instead, I wore a very, very expensive sharkskin grey mohair suit that Larry had bought me, whilst sporting a pair

of grey patent leather winklepickers made by Anello & Davide, shoemakers to the stars. For my fashion faux pas, I received zero points and much negativity from all the judges – and this meant that I was no longer in the contest. As I had very little work for the following weeks, I could have done the full tour with Eddie and Gene, but it was obviously not meant to be.

I understand Eddie's idea of doing a similar show in the US, using the states instead of countries is now in the pipeline – 60 years after Eddie first suggested it – but then again, he was always ahead of the game.

**EARLY ON THE** morning of 8 October this year, I received the devastating news from his sister Babs that Brian 'Licorice' Locking, ex-bassist with Marty Wilde, Eddie Cochran, The Shadows and yours truly – someone I'd known since I was 13 – had passed away in a North Wales hospice. Licorice was like a brother to me and the most amazing person, on and off stage. I'm absolutely gutted.

Our relationship began when, in 1953, I became a member of





Vince with close friend and "mum's boy" Eddie Cochran



the YMCA in our home town of Grantham, Lincolnshire. Brian, along with his pal Roy Clark, had formed a harmonica-playing duo named The Harmonica Vagabonds and they performed at parties, local social clubs and the occasional pub. Until this time, Grantham's main claim to fame had been Sir Isaac Newton – but that was about to change. As I had vocal experience as a chorister and could just about vamp on the harmonica, Brian and Roy invited me to become a Vagabond. I was thrilled and, following a few rehearsals, we were gigging as a trio.

Our skills and following grew and, in late 1955, I heard a record that was to change the course of popular music. It was *Rock Island Line* by Lonnie Donegan and his Skiffle Group. After playing it to the boys, we wanted to feature the song in our Harmonica

Vagabonds setlist, but it just didn't work being played on the instrument. In our efforts to solve the problem, I came across an article in the *NME* that explained skiffle and the homemade instruments it was played on in the southern states of the US. Within days, our mission was to emulate the American skiffles, and I started by making a tea chest bass for Brian. Roy

managed to get hold of a guitar, as did I, and my pal John from next door became our washboard player. Within three to four months, and having more skiffle songs in our act courtesy of Lonnie's first album, we had sufficient material to rename ourselves The Vagabonds Skiffle Group.

**NO SOONER HAD BRIAN MASTERED** the tea chest bass than he became infatuated with the real thing, namely an upright double bass. Lonnie Donegan's bass player was Micky Ashman, who was not only a brilliant musician but also an amazing showman. Following a double decker bus trip to Lincoln – 24 miles away from our home town of Grantham – we purchased a double bass for £20 from Roses Music Shop. However, the return journey proved to be very eventful as we took it in turns to stand on the rear platform of the bus clutching the double bass in one hand, whilst holding on for dear life to the chrome upright bar on the platform with the other.

"How did Brian become Licorice?" is an often asked question. We were travelling from Grantham to a gig near Skegness and stopped off in Boston for

a milkshake and to play records on a jukebox. Adjacent to the milk bar was a novelty shop that sold toy instruments; one was plastic and had a piece of tissue on a small grille, which made a noise when you breathed into the mouthpiece. Roy purchased a trumpet, I bought a saxophone and Brian bought a clarinet, which he played constantly for the remainder of the journey. As clarinets are often referred to as 'licorice sticks', I introduced Brian to the audience that night as Brian 'Licorice' Locking – and I've called him Licorice ever since.

Within a matter of weeks, Licorice was close to mastering his new-found friend "Mr Double Bass", his Micky Ashman-style showmanship had reached another level and was quite unbelievable. He'd found his true vocation in life. Unfortunately, my father didn't appreciate Licorice's skills to the same degree as Roy and I, but why would that be? Well, my father was a very clever man who could make anything with his hands. We'd not long moved house and he was upgrading every room in our new property, as the previous tenants' tastes in decoration and colour schemes were not those of my father. The kitchen was beautiful – big and an unusual shape – and I recall the expletives wafting through the night air as my father endeavoured to tile the floor. Mission accomplished, the newly-tiled kitchen floor looked amazing until, following a skiffle rehearsal one evening, screams could be heard ringing through the cold night air.

As I arrived in the kitchen, I immediately saw my red-faced father pointing at the floor, screaming expletives at a rate of knots. He was pointing out the dozens of holes in his brand new tiled floor made by the spike on Licorice's double bass. Needless to say, our rehearsals were swiftly moved to another location.

Having got to meet Lonnie Donegan following one of his shows, he invited us to play for him and his trio backstage at the Nottingham Empire one Saturday morning. After performing three numbers, Lonnie took me to one side

**LICORICE WAS LIKE A BROTHER TO ME AND THE MOST AMAZING PERSON - ON AND OFF STAGE. I'M ABSOLUTELY GUTTED.**



**The Vagabonds Skiffle Group celebrate their 60th birthday**



and commented, “You and the bass player will make it, but the other lads need more experience”. I was gobsmacked by Lonnie’s remarks and couldn’t wait to tell Licorice. Eighteen months later, I was a Larry Parnes artist and had been renamed Vince Eager, and Licorice was playing for Terry Dene. A new music magazine named *Disc* held a launch party and Licorice and I were invited. As we walked into the gathering of the top names in the industry, a voice called out, “I told ya you’d make it”. Yes, it was Lonnie.

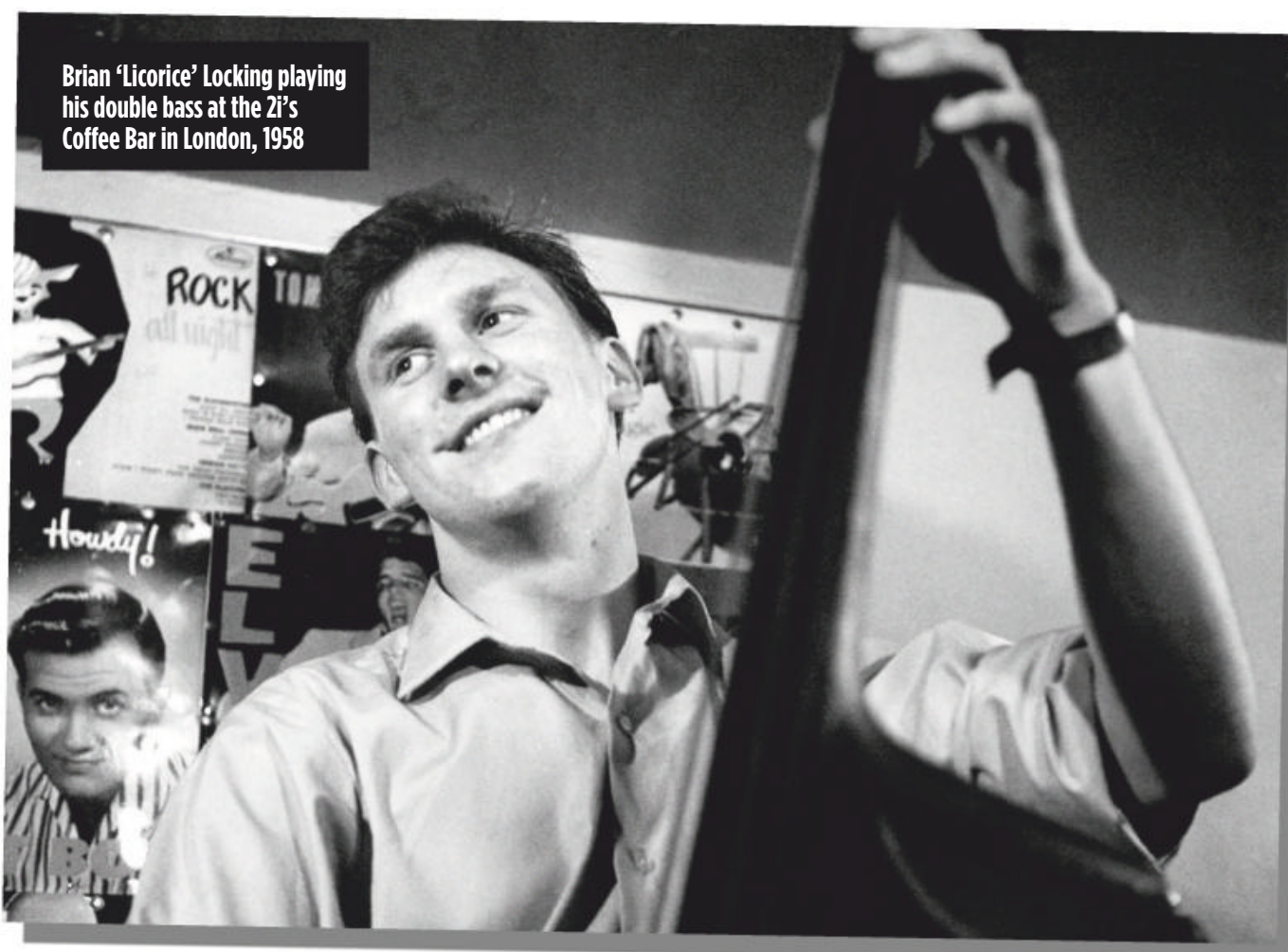
**AS BRILLIANT A MUSICIAN AND SHOWMAN** as he was, Licorice was also a bit of a klutz; someone who would manage to, whilst doing a mundane task, somehow screw it up in a funny sort of way. A good example was when we decided to sew sequins on our shirts. On the right side of our chest was to be the letter H and on our left side would be the letter V, for Harmonica Vagabonds. Roy, Brian and I sat at Brian’s mum’s table and sewed away merrily one Monday evening until Brian suddenly sprang to his feet while lifting up his sequined shirt and

yelled, “Look! I’ve finished!” As he stood proudly and held up his shirt, Roy and I burst into fits of laughter. Licorice had not only sewn the sequins to his shirt front but also to his mum’s tablecloth.

Licorice’s crowning glory as ‘King Klutz’ came when he’d purchased a new bass amplifier, which he wanted to get to his home in South London. Firstly, he took a taxi from Charing Cross Road to Leicester Square tube. He then entered

the tube station and placed his new amp on the first step of the escalator. Unfortunately, the amp had a mind of its own and decided to find its own way down – the consequences being that it tumbled down the escalator. Thankfully, there were no passengers in its way and it came to rest in bits and pieces. King Klutz Licorice had struck again! Bless you Licorice. There’ll never be another like you. ★

**Brian ‘Licorice’ Locking playing his double bass at the Zi’s Coffee Bar in London, 1958**







Sarah Vista:  
The woman  
in black

AS TOLD TO RIK FLYNN

# SOUNDTRACK *Of My Life* **Sarah Vista**

**This six-shooter totin' Brit in black has a soft side, but don't tell anyone... Here are her 10 choice cuts**

**I**t's easy to lose yourself in Sarah Vista's world of wrong-righting murder ballads, ringing revolvers and western reverberations. We fell hard for her darkened charms on the release of 2016's deadly debut *45 I Wish You Hell*, and when first album *Killing Fever*'s fuller menu followed we fell still further, thanks to echoes of Nancy Sinatra, Loretta Lynn, Johnny Cash and a bit of Wanda, but all with a distinctly British edge. Since then, this gun totin' woman in black has continued her ascent with tours all over the world and landed the coveted Honky Tonk Female award at the 2020 Ameripolitan Awards in Memphis. She's been busy in lockdown, too, and next year promises the first single in yet another trilogy of 45s, a couple of collaborations, plus her follow-up long-player. On top of that, she has a western movie and an excellent song series of episodes called *Sunday Saloon*, all available at [youtube/sarahvistamusic](https://youtube.com/sarahvistamusic). You'll find more info at [sarahvista.com](https://sarahvista.com), Instagram or Facebook (Sarahvistamusic). In the meantime, though, let's hear about her favourite records...



## Johnny Cash and June Carter **LONG-LEGGED GUITAR PICKIN' MAN**

1967

I have a guilty penchant for the old his 'n' hers duet, and nobody does it better. I prefer this to the slushy end of the duet game and this one's got balls and humour, I love it. It reminds me of *You're The Reason Our Kids Are Ugly* by Lola Jean Dillon and L.E. White (made famous by Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty), which hits the spot, too. I had fun writing a tongue-in-cheek homage called *My Baby's Bad*, a duet I'll be releasing sometime soon.



## Joyce Green **BLACK CADILLAC**

1959

I love this song, and I love Buddy Moss' *Going To Your Funeral In A Vee Eight Ford*, the bluesy original it was based on, too. Songs about turning the tables on misery are what inspired my project, as let's face it, life's tough. Whatcha gonna do about it, though? Sit and whine and hate on other people, or get up, rev that engine and turn your pain into something that brings joy!? I like to approach writing songs with a sense of humour and this track is one that does just that, and really very well. A classic in Casa Vista!





## Billie Jo Spears

### GET BEHIND ME SATAN AND PUSH

1968

My first drummer gave me an Ace Records CD he worked on called *Good Girls Gone Bad*. I'm a bit weary of references to the devil in song, but was knocked out by this – and the story of her being a teenager when she sang it?! She's a fighter, and this packs an almighty punch. I dig women singers, and anyone that hollers "A sassy lassie done stole my man, if that don't make me mad, nothing can" is alright by me. The strength of her voice against the horns is as sweet as candy, too.



## The Johnny Burnette Trio

### THE TRAIN KEPT A-ROLLIN'

1956

Johnny Burnette is a badass. I always think, "what would it have been like to be around when..." and I think Johnny Burnette was at the coolest end of the rockabilly posse; he was one of the punks really doing their own thing and making a statement. He's got that in-your-face, on-your-feet-NOW vibe in spades. Fuzztone is a big YEAH! [the trio's guitarist Paul Burlison may have accidentally invented distortion when he dropped his amp and damaged one of the tubes, prior to recording this tune – Ed].



## Wanda Jackson

### HARD HEADED WOMAN

1961

Wanda's one of the game-changing icons that helped prove us women weren't just to be looked at, at home cooking the tea or crying into our milk because some boy's left us. She hit the guitar and whacked those vocals out with a style all of her own and looked drop dead gorgeous to boot. She's one of the iconic ladies that made me think, 'I'm gonna get up, turn my troubles into something positive and make people listen'. She definitely holds the listener hostage on this one.



## Ennio Morricone

### THE ECSTASY OF GOLD (L'ESTASI DELL'ORO)

1966

A wildcard, but it'd be wrong if I didn't put a Morricone classic in my Top 10, and this one's a contender for the most epic piece of music ever put to film – I'd fight that statement to the death. Edda Dell'Orso's vocal was the first time I realised a voice could be used as an instrument. The trumpets, bells, epic layers, the explosive climax... it's the soundtrack to a duel even without Sergio Leone's imagery. This makes me want to lock myself in a studio and never come out.



## Johnny Cash

### MAN IN BLACK

1971

Cash at his most powerful. It's got his classic chugging rhythm and deep dulcet tones but boy, the lyrics! Political songs are a minefield, but this one makes a cool, strong statement without telling you what you should be thinking: "I'd love to wear a rainbow every day, to tell the world that everything's OK. But I'll try to carry off a little darkness on my back, 'til things are brighter, I'm the man in black." It may be a mad, bad world we live in, and "There's things that never will be right, I know", but we do have Johnny Cash.



## Whistle Bait

### LORRIE AND LARRY COLLINS

1958

What a duo these kids were. It's hard to believe Larry was 13 when he laid this down. I can tell why a lot of people refer to it as the first punk song, as it's got a wild edge. I had a great time at the Ameripolitan Awards, and one of my personal highlights was meeting and playing with Dakota Collins, my favourite American bass player – who is the nephew of the Collins Kids. He's a kind soul, super talented and has some great stories of growing up in the family, so when I hear this I think of his edgy style and character.



## Gene Vincent

### YOU ARE THE ONE FOR ME

1959

I'll deny it, of course, when I'm donning a six-shooter and wishing people hell, but I do have a soft side and this, for me, is the epitome of romance on record. I'm absolutely crazy about it and it's my go-to for an indulgent back-to-back session on the deck. There are a few versions kicking about, but it's master take number 9 that is, for me, the perfect mix. Simple piano, guitar and bass, the cascading piano solo, ugh, I go weak. Gene's voice, the emotion, "I tremble at your touch". Yes sir, I do.



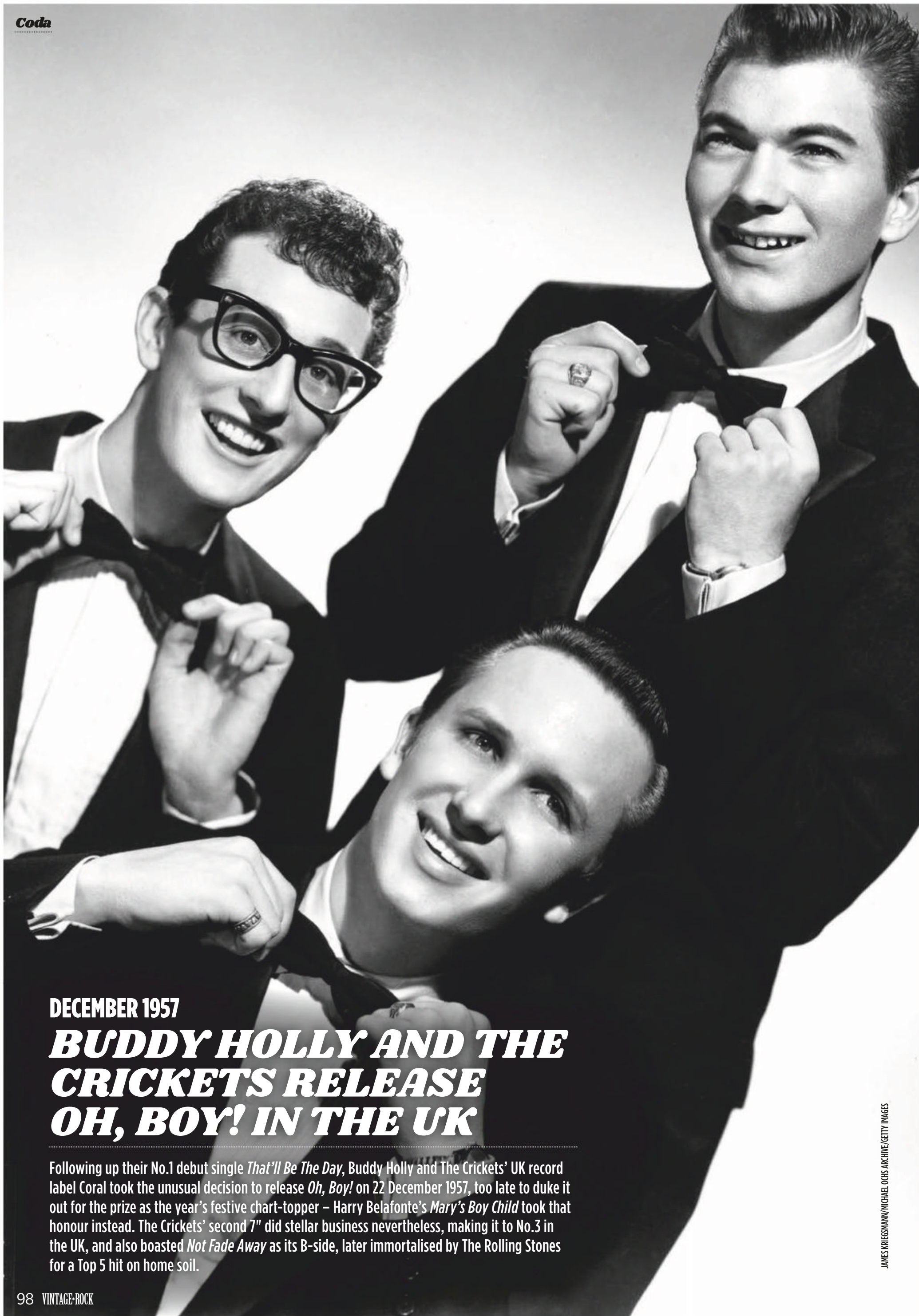
## Chance Halladay

### BURY ME DEEP

1960

A random choice, given I know little about it. I've been searching for years for more information. Someone dear to me managed to uncover a copy of the Bull Dog release, but I know little more than the two singles I can find. There's a suggestion it was someone else in disguise. If anyone can put my mind at ease, I'll be forever indebted! This reminds me a little of *Sixteen Tons* – I love the Tennessee Ernie Ford version. The production, the levels and layers and how they build and drop with his voice...





DECEMBER 1957

## **BUDDY HOLLY AND THE CRICKETS RELEASE OH, BOY! IN THE UK**

Following up their No.1 debut single *That'll Be The Day*, Buddy Holly and The Crickets' UK record label Coral took the unusual decision to release *Oh, Boy!* on 22 December 1957, too late to duke it out for the prize as the year's festive chart-topper – Harry Belafonte's *Mary's Boy Child* took that honour instead. The Crickets' second 7" did stellar business nevertheless, making it to No.3 in the UK, and also boasted *Not Fade Away* as its B-side, later immortalised by The Rolling Stones for a Top 5 hit on home soil.





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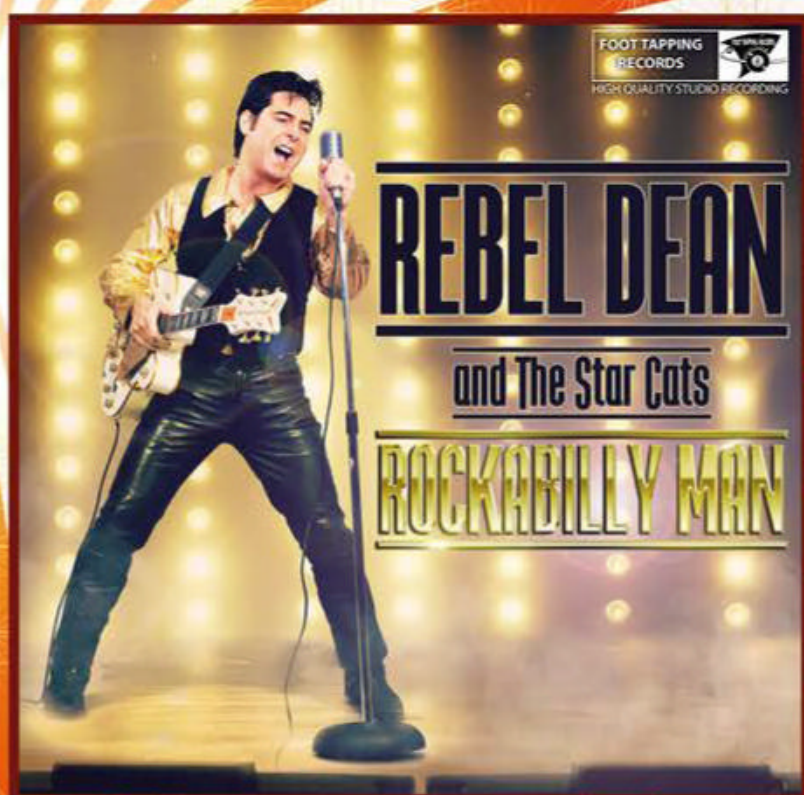
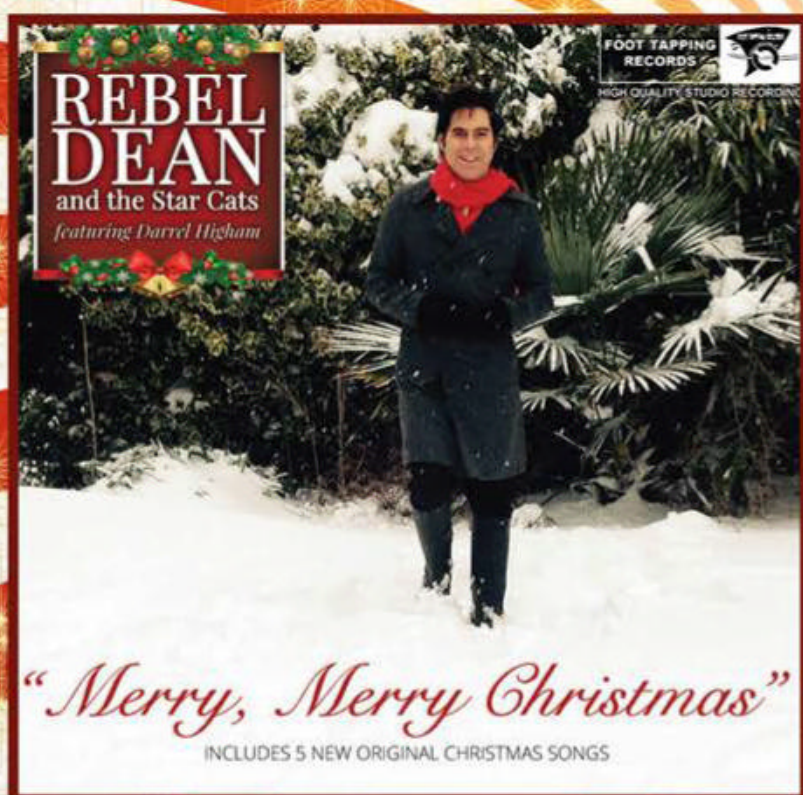
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